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THEODORA;

OR,

STAR BY STAR.

"For this losing is true dying,
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning."

EMERSON.

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BY

THE AUTHOR.

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STAR BY STAR.

CHAPTER I.

THEODORA'S HOME.

"This above all,—to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

HAMLET.

THE old red-brick house, which had been Theodora Baskervyle's only home since she could remember, was in very truth to her the dearest spot on earth. There was little of architectural beauty about it, perhaps, for it had been added to by various owners,—a bow-window thrown out here, a round tower there, without much reference to its original style; but the rooms were large and airy, the staircases broad and noble, while the windows of the ground-floor opened on to a terrace which was the envy of the surrounding gentry, so bright was it with flowers, even at this season when the first glory of its summer had passed.

The house had been built some sixty years before the commencement of my story, by George, Earl of Atherling, as a residence for his two unmarried daughters,

and here had been passed many peaceful years, during which the two old ladies had managed to fill the stately old drawing-rooms with chairs, sofas, and screens,—all the work of their own unwearying fingers. The present daughter of the house, the Theodora of whom I have spoken, was wont to laugh to scorn these works of art, declaring that she only allowed them standing-room in the house that they might prove a warning to the present generation. She could form no conception of the utter monotony of the life led by those great-aunts of hers,—a monotony which nothing broke save the occasional visits of their brother, Lord Atherling. He came to them once every year, bringing with him his fashionable wife and three handsome boys, of whom the youngest was my Theodora's father. Of the three Eustace, the second son, was his aunts' favorite, and to him they bequeathed the house and broad lands of "The Manor," as it was called.

People said that his advent would make a great change in the society of the county, which had been in a state of stagnation for a score of years; there was great tribulation, therefore, when, shortly after his aunts' death, he appeared, a melancholy, broken man, whose solitary life and stern demeanor gained for him a reputation for madness throughout the country-side.

But Eustace was not mad, unless it be madness to love too well where love is vain; perhaps it was madness to regret a woman who, for a year and more, had been his affianced wife, and when their love was at its sweetest and fullest had coldly dismissed him, vouchsafing no explanation. He had loved her loyally and well; had it been death that parted them he could have

borne it with all the strength of his proud nature, hiding the scar from the gaze of a careless world, but she had been so coldly heartless that he had accepted his dismissal as sternly as it had been given, and kissing her white hands, he left her. All hope, however, had not died in his loyal heart, nor did it die until, two months later, he received news of her intended marriage with his eldest brother. To her he uttered no word of reproach, but betook himself to the old manor-house, and the world knew him no more. For twenty years he lived, if such an existence could be called living, a life of unceasing, unavailing regret for all that he had lost.

Was his lost love worthy such devotion, such bitter, hopeless love and regret? He never asked himself the question, and, in truth, it mattered little. Which of us has not clung despairingly to what is not worth the keeping? and how many tears would flow, think you, if we gave our tears to those alone worthy of them? The peace which he longed for came at last, and all tears were wiped from his eyes, let us hope, in the undiscovered country. There were many in the village who asserted confidently that he might still be seen o' nights, a tall, melancholy figure, passing across the sweep of green lawn, or in and out among the old oak-trees. There hung in the dining-room a life-size portrait of him, painted ere the blow which had so blighted his life had fallen, before which my Theodora and her brother would stand admiring the beautiful boy-face which smiled down upon them, and talking in awe-struck undertones of poor Uncle Eustace, as they had fallen into the habit of calling him.

Theodora had been but three years of age when her

father succeeded to his brother's property, and with the exception of a short visit to London she had hardly been beyond the limits of her own county. Her nearest and dearest friend was her father; between the two there was the most perfect sympathy, and a similarity of tastes which made their companionship doubly delightful. In fact, Theodora was the joy of her father's existence; full well she recognized the fact; that it should be so was her pride. George Baskervyle clung to his daughter the more in that there was small companionship possible between himself and his wife, and that Ethelbert, his other child, the first-born, was a bitter disappointment to him. It was hard to look into the boy's brave, handsome face and understand or forgive the father when he wished him other than he was. Still it was undeniable that the son and heir was far fonder of boating and cricket, while at school, than of his books, and it was a sad fact that when he went up for his "little go" he was most ignominiously plucked. "It is not that I mind the boy's failing in his examination," the irate father said, "but he never had an original thought or made an original remark in his life. Look at Theodora! when she was but twelve years of age she could have passed that examination. No; the lad's only hope is in marriage. He is bound to be the slave of some woman through life, and in good hands may be of some use in his day and generation, without being in the smallest degree aware of the fact." Theodora thought her father unjust, and fought for her brother on that and many subsequent occasions. Nor were these the only battles fought by this intrepid young person. When the time came for her to be con-

firmed, to the horror of the parish clergyman and the despair of her mother she distinctly refused. It was in vain that the curate was engaged to prepare her for confirmation. The only answer which he received was, "I don't believe what you tell me. I never have believed it, and I never shall!" The curate gave up the task as hopeless, and the rector, who then offered his services, met with no better success. She listened, as in duty bound, to his long exhortations, but would run to her father dreadfully puzzled, poor child. She came at last in tears, saying,—

"Papa, I can stand it no longer. It is impossible to agree with Mr. Howard; the man is utterly illogical: he has been describing heaven and hell to me all the morning. I don't believe that there is a hell, and I told him so; as to heaven, according to his account it is a mass of gold and precious stones; so, when he asked me if I did not long to be there, I said 'no,' that I thought the earth must be far more beautiful. So he said that 'eye had not seen nor ear heard, nor had it entered into the heart of man to conceive of the glory of heaven.'"

"Well, my child," her father had answered, "he quoted correctly, or nearly so."

"But, papa, I'm afraid that I offended him, then, for I said, as that was the case, I was not bound to accept his description."

"No wonder he was annoyed. You must learn, Theodora, to respect people's prejudices."

This reproof was very severe, coming from her father, but Theodora only said, "I'll try, papa," very meekly. The result was, however, a civil little note

from Mr. Baskervyle, saying that Mr. Howard need not trouble himself to prepare Theodora for confirmation. "She is a good girl," the father wrote, "and I think we may safely leave it to time." To his daughter he spoke more openly. "Search out the truth for yourself, my daughter," he said, "for it is better to be in error, and through much tribulation and with many tears fight your way to the light, than to follow the crowd blindly with a lukewarm enthusiasm for you know not what; in matters of religion let no man be your guide, for it must spring from your own heart and your own mind. Be God himself your only priest, and nature your only church. Never be afraid of inquiry; all that cannot stand that test had better fall; but when you question see that you question honestly. Finally, even where you differ, respect the opinions of others, striving to make your life such that they shall have good reason to respect yours."

From that time forth a large part of Theodora's time was passed in the study of theology. After a year of diligent study she came into her father's library one morning, a Bible in her hand, and placed it upon his table, saying,—

"Papa, I can make nothing of it."

"I am sorry, my child, but I cannot help you."

There the subject was dropped.

Theodora was now eighteen,—the joy of her father, and a source of much imaginary grief to her mother.

On this autumn afternoon of which I write, Mrs. Baskervyle was airing her pet grievance. She had succeeded in waylaying her husband on the terrace, and placing herself by his side, she began,—

"George, I really wish that you would insist upon Theodora going to church. Mr. Howard was speaking about it yesterday, and it looks so badly."

"Is that your only reason for objecting to her absence?" inquired her husband.

"No, it is not the only reason by any means, but it is one reason, and Theo should not be allowed to neglect so obvious a duty."

"But she does not consider it her duty. My dear, your argument is defective."

"Oh, you always uphold Theodora in her vagaries! All I hope and pray is that before you are taken from us she may be well married; though as to marrying, it will be a mercy if she does not take up with some Communist or Polish refugee, or something equally disreputable. She affects to despise all the young men whom she meets, and never exerts herself to talk with any one save her cousin Hugh, and with him she quarrelled from the time he came until he left. I had so hoped that they might have fancied each other."

Mr. Baskervyle did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon Theodora as she came towards them across the sunlit terrace. Theodora was a tall woman, with the figure of a Diana, and a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon face, honest, open, and intelligent. Her eyes were large, clear, and gray, perhaps a trifle too keen for beauty. Her mouth was large and firm. She seldom smiled, but when she did her handsome face lighted up so wonderfully and softened so that strangers would stare at her in surprise. I am obliged to confess that her hands were not tiny as should be those of a heroine, but from the slender wrists to the tips of the almond-

shaped nails they were perfect in shape. She was dressed in that most becoming of dresses to a tall and well-formed woman, a riding-habit, while under her pretty Tyrolese hat gleamed a wealth of soft, golden hair, Theodora's one great beauty. "She should have been a queen," said her proud father, as she approached and took the vacant seat by his side. Aloud he said,—

"Theo, your mother complains that you treated your cousin Hugh very badly."

"Papa, I only had one quarrel with him, and that he brought upon himself by quoting Saint Paul upon the subject of women. Now he knows that I disagree with Saint Paul. I told him so, whereupon he said that he disliked levity, especially in a woman." Here Theo put on her cousin's stern look, and resembled him in truth not a little. "Ida was there. She looked assent, saying that it must indeed have been a privilege to have lived in those early days, and to have sat at the feet of Saint Paul.

"'Ah, my dear,' I said, 'you are the clinging and typical ivy, a very proper thing for a young woman to be. I'm not; and had fate ordained that I should have formed one of the band of early Christians, I should have fought with more zeal than discretion, and very probably have fallen a martyr to popular fury.'

"Ida said that 'of course that might have been her fate too,' but I assured her that nothing was more improbable. Hugh smiled. I think that he agreed with me for once, and was quite aware that Ida would take very good care of herself. I dare say that I was wrong in making myself so disagreeable in my own house, but I could not help it. Ida is too intensely exasper-

ating when she puts on that look of concentrated virtue."

"Indeed, Theodora," here interrupted her mother, "Ida is an exceedingly well-bred and a remarkably sensible young woman. There is much in her that you would do well to imitate."

"Thanks, mother," answered the girl, with something very like a quiet scorn in her eyes; "but I never *imitate* any one, preferring to stand or fall on my own merits. Ida is, I have no doubt, all that you say, but the next time you invite any one here for my particular delectation, let it be some one else, for I honestly prefer the society of Polly, the dairy-maid; her opinions have the advantage of originality at least, while to talk to Ida is like reading a page of Miss Hannah More, or 'The Polite Letter-Writer.' There are the horses. Yes, Bertie, coming!" to her brother, who was heard at this moment calling lustily through the hall, with the natural impatience of a man when called upon to wait for his sister or wife.

The parents' eyes followed them as they rode down the broad avenue. Once Theodora glanced back; how well she remembered the picture in after-years! The old red-brick house, with its background of dark trees, gleaming bright in the sunlight, and above all her father's tall figure as he stood watching them until they were out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

"Be earnest, earnest, earnest, mad if thou wilt;
Do what thou dost as if the stake were heaven,
And that thy last deed ere the judgment-day,
When, all done, nothing's done. There's rest above;
Below let work be death, if work be love!"

The Saints' Tragedy.

WHEN the news reached him that the old manor-house had been bequeathed him by his brother, George Baskervyle was settled with his wife and two young children in a pleasant home, a few miles from Brussels, from which he watched the outside world with the eyes of a philosopher. Had it been possible, he would have gladly postponed the ceremony of taking possession, but his wife urged his return to England.

"It is only right for the children's sake that you should take your proper position in your own county," was her argument.

It must be confessed that her husband yielded with a bad grace; but he yielded, which was all that his wife wanted. Deep-seated in her own soul was a profound contempt for her husband's intellect, the utility of which she very much questioned. What use had he made of what his admirers were accustomed to call his talents? of what advantage had it been to him that he was the son and the brother of an earl? He seemed to entirely

ignore the fact. It was what Mrs. Baskervyle called "flying in the face of Providence."

She was happier after their return to England, and took her place in society as the Hon. Mrs. Baskervyle, and mistress of the manor-house, with a small feeling of triumph which her husband fully appreciated, and at which he was secretly not a little amused.

George Baskervyle had never been an ambitious man, and was quite satisfied with the modest two thousand per annum which his estate yielded. In early life he had tried to interest himself in politics, but found so much that was utterly discouraging that ere long he retired from the field. In those days he began a book which was supposed to put forth a system of government which comprised all that was best in the theories of St. Simon and Rousseau, modernized by Bentham. This production, over which he smiled in after-years, never saw the printer's office. He found his young daughter poring over the manuscript one morning, and chagrined that young person not a little by his pitiless sarcasm on the subject of the Utopia therein described:

"Let it be a warning to you, my dear, never to endeavor to reform society; you will find it stronger than you, and perhaps things are as well as they are. I am growing an old man, and begin to recognize the advantages of a country where peace reigns."

"But papa, how can you, how dare you say that things are as well as they are, when we have only to pass our park gates to see wretchedness and misery all around us? I think you ought to publish your book. It will do good, papa, for it will make people think; it has made me do so."

"No, no, my child! put it away. It cost me some labor years ago; had it been given then to the world, it would have been rejected, and now, looking at it with all the years between my present stand-point and the vague hopes and dreams of youth, I see plainly that it would have done more harm than good. You, too, will learn to accept life as it is, my Theo."

"Never, papa, never! I don't care how wild your theory may have been, it is better to make an error in judgment than to be, like the vast majority of the world, with no hopes save those for self-advancement, in the meanest sense of the term, no love or desire for what is just and true, until at last they lose all the sense of justice which God gave them, all admiration for what is noble, because they have become themselves ignoble, and sit down like slaves, satisfied with the lowest, when they might have attained to the highest."

"Ah! my dear, the highest seems strangely near our earth to aspiring youth, which is apt to think that all change must be for the better. There was a school formed, as you know, my dear, which, together with many even more impracticable schemes for reform, acknowledging how wofully the church had failed, was desirous of investing the philosophers with the supreme power once accorded the church. They forgot how dangerous a thing power is, and that the philosophers being as human as were the priests, according to every reasonable expectation would, in their turn, abuse it. A brighter future may be before the world, but I see small signs of it. In the mean time, my daughter, the world is intolerant; and if so to men, how much more so to women, who are suffering now, and will suffer for

long years to come, from the deepest injustice? You have the true martyr's spirit, my poor Theo, but the martyr's crown would ill become that pretty head," he said, gently pressing his lips against the soft golden hair.

The warning came late. Had George Baskervyle been able to see into the dim future, would he, I wonder, have shrunk from the task for which his teaching had fitted Theo?

"I don't expect to be a martyr, papa," the girl said, with a bright smile, "but I shall try to help and succor my own sex; and if I were right, acting out the promptings of my own heart, I would not flinch were the whole world to cry fie! upon me."

"My dear, the world does not deal tenderly with the fearless."

"But I don't mind the world, papa. *You* would know that I was right, and though you are fond of preaching prudence you would encourage me,—you know that you would."

"Ah! my dear, you forget how soon I may be called upon to resign the small power which I possess."

"Please, papa, don't!" Theo said, instinctively drawing nearer to him, and rubbing her soft cheek against his shoulder with a tender motion.

He kissed her bowed head, and she brushed away her tears with an impatient gesture. She did not observe that his eyes were also moist, and little dreamed how near the time was drawing when that strong arm would no longer be her support. Theodora told a dear friend, after long years, that the last perfect day of her life had been that on which we have seen her riding

down the avenue, leaving the old red-brick house behind her, and her father standing on the terrace gazing after her.

He was at the door to welcome them on their return, and Theo loved to remember that he took an arm of each and led them into the house.

Ethelbert was dining with the officers of a regiment quartered near, and Theodora thrust her golden head into the dining-room, where her father sat over his wine, with,—

"Do, papa, come into the library to-night. Mamma is filling reams of paper in the drawing-room, and her pen is literally *shrieking*. We can have such a quiet chat."

In their favorite room, therefore, were spent the last hours they were destined to spend together. Her father was more communicative than was usual, telling her much of his youth and early manhood, and something, too, of his brother Eustace, whose life and premature death had been a source of much mystery to Theodora.

"I will tell you his life's secret, my dear," her father said. "You will hear it some day, and I should prefer you to hear it from my lips. He has passed away, and the other person most concerned once begged me to tell you the story. It occurred when I was too young to thoroughly understand all the circumstances, but I have since learned that my poor brother's life was sacrificed to the ambition of an unprincipled woman and the desires of one who of all others should have held his happiness dear. I speak of my elder brother, on whose head the curse fell as surely as it did upon the

head of poor Eustace. You have never seen your aunt Theodora, and can therefore form no conception of what she was at eighteen, when she was first presented and so dazzled the London world. Even as I remember her, when years of the most bitter sorrow had wrought great havoc, her beauty was undeniable. Although she appeared on the scene as an engaged girl, she did not lack suitors, and few men in the position of poor Eustace would have manifested such perfect confidence in the woman they loved. I could never learn by what means Theodora was induced to break her engagement with my brother, or what persuaded her to accept my eldest brother's proposal of marriage. I am inclined to think that her mother's influence was great, and that, weary of opposition, she yielded. Eustace, who, as in duty bound, had accepted her decision as to the breaking of their engagement, was, however, wild with rage and disappointed love when he learned for whose sake he had been discarded. There was a meeting between the brothers; what passed none ever knew; but years after, when, urged by my mother, I attempted to bring about a reconciliation between them, Eustace repeated the curse which he had then uttered. Time had not softened his hatred. 'Are you a traitor, too?' he said. 'Is it in the blood of the Baskervyles, that you urge me to touch that man's hand? Do you know that he advised patience? "Leave her," he said; "she will relent."' And, Theodora, I could find no words wherewith to excuse such treason. Against her he breathed no word of censure, and though on that occasion he gave me some jewels which she had returned to him at the time of their estrangement, together with a

letter which I deemed it right to deliver, her name was never again mentioned between us."

"I think that she was the more guilty of the two," said Theo, indignantly. "False to her plighted word, —false to her womanhood. Papa, how could you have called me by her name?"

"You must learn to 'pity the laden one,' my child. If ever woman carried a burden too heavy for her strength, that woman is Theodora. A wretched wife, even her children were small solace to her, owing to her husband's tyrannical spirit, which induced him to separate her from her boy. She has passed a few peaceful years since his death, but she has long been a broken-spirited woman. She was with us at the time of your birth, and one day, as you lay on her knee, she begged me to do what I have now done, tell you her pitiful story. 'Tell her,' she said, 'to remember me when temptations assail her; that nothing in the whole world is worth the sacrifice of her self-respect, and that all the world could give her would never repay for its loss.' I think that I have taught you that, my child?"

"Yes, papa; I am not afraid that I shall ever forget it," the girl said, proudly. "But why does my aunt never come here?"

"I have been afraid to ask her, for your brother so wonderfully resembles Eustace that I feared it might be painful to her; and, indeed, had I asked her, it is very doubtful if she would have come. Her health is now failing her, and it is many years since she has been persuaded to leave King's Gift, even for a night. You will know her some day, and pity where you now blame."

They talked late into the night, and when her father turned to leave her with a good-night kiss at her bedroom door, Theo, moved by she knew not what impulse, slipped her hand through his arm, and drew down the dear old head for one last kiss. It was, indeed, the last, though the poor child was spared the knowledge.

The following morning George Baskervyle was found dead in his bed. The doctors came and went, friends went in and out, treading noiselessly, as though fearing to disturb that sleep of death, and his broken-hearted daughter knelt by the bedside in mute despair, stupefied by grief. The old family physician stood apart with Ethelbert; he was telling him that though the blow which had fallen had found them so perfectly unprepared, George Baskervyle himself had been for some months well aware that the end was not far distant; "and," he continued, "you remember, my boy, that he went to London in the spring; he then acted on my advice. I wished him to consult Dr. Armstrong, although I needed no confirmation of the correctness of my own belief that the heart was most seriously affected. I urged him to tell you, but he feared that you would betray him to your mother and sister. He seemed particularly to dread Theodora's grief, so I said nothing."

They tried vainly to console Theodora, but she refused all comfort and all companionship, save that of her brother, who sat with her for hours, her cold hands clasped in his, neither speaking. This silent sympathy was her only comfort in these dark days.

Death had in a measure united the father and son, and though, as was natural, Ethelbert's grief was less deep

than was Theo's, he had never felt more sure of his father's love than he did when he stood gazing at the peaceful face, the closed eyes, which never more would look upon him, the half-smiling lips, which would never more utter words of praise or blame.

There is something in the presence of death which makes all things plain, and the boy for the first time realized that his father's very love for him had been the cause of what at the time had seemed injustice,—

> "That little fretting fretfulness
> Was but love's over-anxiousness,
> Which had not been had love been less."

"Poor old father!" he said, sadly. "I am afraid that I was small comfort to him."

Theo shrank as though from a blow. Much as she loved her father, who was her king, and could do no wrong, she knew and recognized all the injustice which had been done her brother,—not in deed, truly, but was not the very place she held in her father's heart a bitter wrong? And Ethelbert's words stung her. There seemed an implied rebuke in the words and the tone in which they were spoken.

"Oh, Bertie!" she said, beseechingly, "don't blame him now. He was so clever himself he did not always understand that we should not be capable of what was so simple to him, but he loved you dearly, Bertie; indeed, indeed, he did." She stood before her brother, the tears streaming down her pale cheeks; both his hands were clasped in her own, and she spoke in a broken, trembling voice, with an almost childlike simplicity which touched her brother inexpressibly. This

weeping, clinging child was so different from their proud, self-satisfied Theo. The tears were in his own eyes as he bent over her and kissed the trembling lips.

"Don't fret, dear old girl. I never doubted our father's love, and if you were the favorite it was but natural, and I am the last man to grudge you your pre-eminence. He was a dear old father to us both, and it is hard, God knows, to have lost him," he added, with a sob.

This little explanation between them did Theodora good, and united the brother and sister not a little, making their sorrow only half a sorrow since they shared it together.

Lord Atherling arrived the day before the funeral was to take place; he had come with all possible speed from Paris, where the news had followed him. Ethelbert was astonished to see how much his father's death had affected his cousin, whose feelings were never put into words. One glance at his face, however, was sufficient; suffering lay stamped there all too plainly. The few words of condolence which he uttered as he pressed Mrs. Baskervyle's hand were heartfelt, although they might strike coldly on the ear; but his eyes passed beyond her to where Theo stood, pale and tearless. She held out a cold hand to him, and looked up with such a pitiful attempt at a smile of welcome that Hugh was touched as Ethelbert had been, the change in the girl was so great, and stooping, he touched her forehead with his lips. Mrs. Baskervyle, although at the moment she appeared to be in danger of dissolving into tears, like the young woman in Fouqué's tale, noted the unwonted mark of affection; it would have been an

overwhelming and crushing grief, truly, which had made her oblivious to the attentions of an earl.

Theodora was touched, and the more so that she could not but see that the lines in the hard face were strangely softened. Doubting her own self-control, she escaped a few moments later. There were many arrangements to be made, and night was closing ere Lord Atherling found himself at liberty to gaze for the last time on the face of the dead. It was not until he had closed the door behind him that he became aware that some one was kneeling by the coffin; he turned quickly to leave the room, but not before he had recognized Theodora and overheard the words which fell from her, a passionate, despairing cry: "Papa, papa, I will endure to the end,—I will be strong and true as you would have wished me to be, but how can I live without you? Ah, papa, papa! come back." Her frame was convulsed with sobs, and Hugh, thoroughly unnerved and unmanned, crept as softly as possible from the room to his own, ashamed to have been the witness, though an involuntary one, of such love and grief. He left the house without again seeing his cousin, for Theodora was too ill to leave her bed on the following day, or for many days after.

So George Baskervyle was numbered with the dead; the grave had closed over him; the undertaker and his men had departed with all their senseless paraphernalia, with which we endeavor to rob King Death of all dignity, and his place knew him no more. There was no sign now that he had ever been, save the great hatchment which they had placed over the entrance-door, and, ah! such a dreary void in his daughter's aching heart!

CHAPTER III.

KING'S GIFT.

"Nay, grieve not for the dead alone,
Whose song has told their hearts' sad story;
Weep for the voiceless, who have known
The cross without the crown of glory."
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

THE days dragged their slow length along. Ethelbert had, with a certain selfishness which seems inherent in man, found that important business required his presence in London. Theodora passed her days in the old library, seated in the arm-chair which her father had been used to occupy during long hours of study or pleasant talk, the great tears rolling down her cheeks unheeded. All interest in life seemed to have departed with him; and when her mother suggested passing the winter in London her heart, in very truth, died within her. Leave the dear old home, from which she had never been parted for more than two or three weeks, and then her father had borne her company, and the parting had been no parting; to leave it now, when all that was left to her of that dear father were the inanimate objects which surrounded her, which seemed to retain something of his presence, and take her sorrow and despair to that cold, dark city which she had always hated!

"They are all anxious to get away where they can forget him," she said to herself, with bitterness. Remonstrance was vain; that she knew full well, for her mother was one of those weak people who are yet sufficiently consistent to return again and yet again to the attack, never for a moment losing sight of the object in view,—a course of proceeding which will in the end wear out the most determined opposition. Very welcome, therefore, was a tender little note from her aunt Theodora, expressing the deepest sympathy with her in her sorrow, which she in so great a measure shared, concluding with an invitation to pass some weeks at King's Gift. The letter was so essentially different from the stereotyped letters of condolence with which they had been favored, full of "Your poor papa" and quotations from Scripture, that it did the girl's heart good, and she awaited her mother's decision as to the propriety of accepting the invitation with an anxiety for which she afterwards reproached herself. The permission was readily granted.

Perhaps Mrs. Baskervyle remembered that Lord Atherling had, since his father's death, passed much of his time at King's Gift, and that his mother's interest in his handsome cousin Theodora was calculated to encourage him in a devotion which she was bound to acknowledge he had not as yet manifested. True to her *rôle* of martyr, she said, "I shall be very lonely without you, of course, but it will be better that you should be away and with young people. No words could describe the monotony of life at King's Gift when I was last there, but since your uncle's death I dare say it is gayer; he certainly was a most disagreeable person."

"I do not expect to be gay for some time to come," sighed Theo, the tears in her voice and eyes. "If you are lonely, let me stay with you. We have only each other now,—you, Bertie, and I."

"My dear Theo, when did I ever allow personal feeling to interfere with what was for your advantage? It is most necessary that you should stand well with your aunt; her introduction will be of great service to you. Lady Atherling's position in London is excellent, and as you are several years older than Mabel your interests will not clash, though, from what her brother tells me, you are so different in style that it would not be the case, even were you presented at the same time. You need have no scruples in leaving me, my dear; I am most anxious that you should go. You will not miss me much, I dare say," she added, querulously, "for I was always second with you. You never depended on me for advice or society as most girls depend upon their mothers."

"I think I have always been obedient to you, mamma," Theo said, "and I am not aware that I have ever disregarded your advice when it has been offered."

She tried to keep the intense annoyance which her mother's reference to the advantages which might accrue from Lady Atherling's friendship caused her from showing itself in her face and voice; in truth, it seemed to Theo in the worst possible taste, and she was half inclined to refuse her aunt's invitation there and then. The effort, however, was unsuccessful, and a certain shrewdness which had stood Mrs. Baskervyle in good stead ere now taught her that her daughter waxed dangerous.

"Well, my dear, I dare say that you have, and I must say, Theodora, that you are to be trusted; you may write to your aunt and say that she may expect you the Tuesday of next week. Stay, I will write a few lines myself; it will seem more gracious."

The following week, therefore, found Theodora established at King's Gift. It was her father's old home, and he formed the topic of conversation between aunt and niece not unfrequently. Lady Atherling had been four or five years his senior, and was well acquainted with his early life. She told Theo of his struggles for liberty and his bitter disappointments; of the beautiful girl who had so loved him, and whose early death had caused him such deep grief. Theodora was intensely interested, for, in common with most children, she had never given her parents credit for the sentimental experience which, however, she fully expected to realize in her own person.

"Poor girl!" she said, wistfully; "I have always found it so hard for those who really cling to life, when they are taken."

"Ah, Theo! there is much that is worse than death, —may you never know how much worse!"

Theo pressed her aunt's hand tenderly. She did not speak, remembering all that her father had told her of this woman's youth.

Lady Atherling was a handsome woman. Her snow-white hair was soft and thick; her eyes were that deep blue so seldom seen, save in Ireland; her figure was tall and slight; and, but for the lines which sorrow had rivelled, her face was almost youthful still. Her daughter was as unlike her as possible, being a tiny,

fascinating little creature, just fifteen, as pretty as a thing from fairy-land. The tyrant of the entire family, no one was so thoroughly her slave as was her mother, who seemed to live, move, and have her being in this idol of her heart, and all the long-pent-up tenderness of her passionate nature found vent in this all-absorbing love. She could deny the child nothing, and the little creature ran a very fair chance of being utterly spoiled.

Theo, although she had a natural horror of interference, could not prevent her tell-tale face from manifesting quiet disapproval on one occasion when her aunt yielded to some whim of her daughter's which had been far better opposed. Lady Atherling observed the look, and as the child left the room she looked into Theo's face with a deprecating glance which was touching.

"I see, my dear, that in your heart you are blaming me for my over-indulgence, but I suffered so bitterly in my youth from harshness and severity, that, as I remember it all, I feel there is no sacrifice I can make for my darling's happiness which I would not make gladly."

"I was only thinking, Aunt Theo, that as self-denial must be practised by a woman all her life long, it might be better for my cousin if her self-discipline were to begin now, in a measure."

"I know that you are right," sighed her aunt, "but it is beyond my strength to insert the thin end of the wedge."

Theodora held her peace; she was beginning to learn that, in nine cases out of ten, there is more wisdom in silence than in all the eloquence in the world; but she

trembled for the future, and treated her little cousin to more than one small lecture when that young person's selfishness had made itself very apparent.

On these occasions Mabel would open her blue eyes with unfeigned surprise, and fly for sympathy to Ida, where she was always sure of receiving not only the sympathy to which she thought herself entitled, but, what was far more dangerous, flattery.

Ida Lyndall was the orphan daughter of Lady Atherling's earliest friend, who, on her husband's death, which occurred in India, where his regiment had been quartered since his marriage, had returned to England, but only to die. As she lay on her death-bed she confided her little daughter to Lady Atherling's care.

"There is no member of her father's family willing, or indeed able, to receive her. I am alone in the world; you are rich and powerful, Theodora, and you will not forsake her?" pleaded the poor woman.

"I will care for her as for my own child," answered her friend, as she pressed her lips to the pale face, already cold with the damps of death. She kept her word, and although her husband strongly objected to Ida's admission into the home-circle, for once Lady Atherling was firm, saying,—

"I passed my word that it should be so when her mother lay at the point of death. It is too late now to shrink from the responsibility; she shall not trouble you."

"See that she does not; and mind, my lady, I will not have Hugh robbed to pay for her education. You have money of your own; if you choose to spend it on her, you may do so," was the brutal answer.

Lady Atherling simply bowed her head; she had long ceased to contend. Thenceforth Ida took her place at King's Gift, and Hugh, when he next returned from school, found her standing with his mother at the entrance-door to welcome him,—a prim little maiden dressed in deep mourning. She made herself very necessary to her benefactress as she grew older, and was, indeed, a quiet, harmless young creature.

The old lord hated her to the end. The girl's almost servile manner towards him annoyed Lady Atherling, though it was impossible for her to encourage anything like rebellion; but the more she watched Ida the more convinced she became that interference was unnecessary. His lordship's scowls passed unnoticed by the girl; his most cutting sarcasms appeared to fall on unheeding ears. They moved Ida neither to tears nor anger, though most people would have found them hard to bear. Her ladyship decided that the child was inured to his harsh treatment, and separated them as much as possible. It was only when she acquainted Ida with her husband's death that she recognized for the first time something of what had been burning in the girl's heart for years. Ida was completely taken by surprise, and for once in her life lost all self-control. The passionate look of triumph which for one second only blazed in her light-blue eyes, giving them an almost lurid light, made Lady Atherling shrink from her appalled. It was but for that single second, and then, as in duty bound, Ida's handkerchief was before her eyes and she was weeping softly. "Could I have been mistaken?" thought Lady Atherling, as she moved away. Upon the whole, every one was

forced to acknowledge that Ida Lyndall was a satisfactory girl; but I am inclined to think that Theodora Baskervyle was right when she objected to her as a companion. She was, as Theo said, "exasperating."

It was hard for Theodora to maintain a discreet silence when she marked how Ida flattered the mother through the child, and strove to ingratiate herself with each in turn. The honest-hearted girl turned from her in disgust.

"Aunt Theo, are you very fond of Ida?" she inquired, suddenly, one day, as they sat at work.

Her aunt looked up with surprise. "Yes, my dear; she is so kind to my child, and, furthermore, she is what I call a comfortable girl. It would have been impossible for me to have managed a 'tomboy' or one of the fast young ladies of the present day; but why do you ask? do you object to her, Theo?"

"Indeed I do," was Theo's brusque answer.

"What fault do you find with her?"

"No fault, and, therefore, every fault," laughed Theo. "I would rather marry the 'tomboy,' or the fast young lady of whom you spoke, than stand my chances with Miss Ida."

"I expect it is a case of Dr. Fell," said her aunt, smiling. "I myself would prefer a little more spontaneity. Ida is, perhaps, somewhat cold and wise for one so young, but her position as a dependent has been a sad one, and may have developed her very worst characteristics. You must try to judge her with charity."

"I don't believe that her position has influenced her character in the slightest degree. I have a curious theory about her; she seems to me like a person who

must have existed for long ages, always placid, always successful, always making use of those about her. Most people would call her a handsome girl. I was studying her from head to foot the other day, and that cold, faultless body of hers is really very perfect. You can find no fault with her; there is nothing to disapprove, but everything to desire. Her hair and eyes want color, her lips fulness, her cheeks blood; there is something unearthly about her. I am convinced that if we were to visit the churchyards o' nights we should find her perched upon one of the tombstones, with the other Lamias; those small white teeth of hers look as though they would know how to close over their food."

"My dear child, you are really too absurd. Poor Ida! her appetite is never very great."

"That's just it," exclaimed Theo, triumphantly. "She satisfies her hunger with her own natural food, and does not eat enough of our honest roasts to keep a bird alive."

"My dear child, seriously speaking, you must not allow your prejudices, which I perceive are of the strongest, to influence your judgment, and take antipathies when there is no justifiable reason for so doing."

"I will try and be more charitable, Aunt Theo," the girl answered, meekly. Nevertheless, Ida remained as much Dr. Fell as ever.

Lord Atherling was much from home during Theo's stay at King's Gift; he was occupied with urgent Parliamentary affairs. He had taken his seat in the House, and men prophesied great things of him. He found time for a flying visit during Christmas week. Theo noticed that his mother greeted him with a timidity

which was strange, and, indeed, they all felt a certain restraint in his presence, with the exception of Mabel, who took liberties with her stern brother as with every one else. Theodora used to force herself to talk and act precisely as usual before him. She was perfectly aware of her mother's wishes as to her marriage, and would not acknowledge that there was any *arrière pensée* in her mind concerning him, in consequence. He would listen to poor Theo's truly wonderful plans with something suspiciously like a sneer on his face, and it must be confessed that Theo fully appreciated his scorn, and pronounced her cousin "the most conceited person possible."

"I should like to do some great good," she was saying one day, with the delicious confidence of youth, which never for a moment conceives the possibility of failure.

"Unassisted?" inquired her cousin, who was chary of his words.

"Oh, dear, no! I should naturally expect your co-operation."

"Indeed!" with well-feigned surprise; "I'm afraid I should prove most inefficient. Your scheme for improvement embraces all human nature, I am given to understand. I can assure you that so stupendous an undertaking is quite beyond my powers."

"I would not have supposed that anything could have been beyond you, Hugh," said his cousin, looking up at him innocently, and speaking in apparent good faith.

"You flatter me," he said, dryly. "My capabilities are most insignificant, I assure you."

Lady Atherling had been looking very uncomfortable for some time past. She knew that the combatants were very evenly matched, and hastened to interrupt.

"You will desire less, dear Theo, as you grow older, and find that peace of mind is the great good, and the only one which we may dare hope for."

"But I do hope for more, Aunt Theo. I expect to be useful, and I hope to be happy."

"What is happiness?" asked the elder woman, in the tone in which Pilate might have put his great question, "What is truth?"

"The absence of any great cause for misery," answered her son, looking up from his book, to which he had returned after his passage of arms with his cousin.

"Well answered, my son," said his mother; "though you are yet too young to have been driven to that conclusion," she added, with a sigh.

"I have never had any reason for thinking otherwise," he said coldly, as he left the room.

He did not see the wistful sadness on his mother's face, but Theo saw it all, and blamed him in her heart, thinking, "Is not her burden heavy enough, that he must add to its weight?" The mother and son loved each other, in truth, with a love which neither dared to show. The son's apparent coldness repelled the mother, while, on his part, whenever they seemed to be drawing nearer to each other, his childhood rose before him, and he doubted her, saying to himself, "If she were indifferent to me then, how can she be expected to love me now!" So those past years rose up between them, forming an unsurmountable barrier.

Theodora breathed more freely after the departure of the master of the house.

"I am half afraid to leave you under Theo's influence, Ida," he had said, as he stood by the dog-cart which was to take him to the station. "I expect that by the time I return you will have started a mission."

"I think not, Hugh," she said, gently. "You know that I am not aware that women have wrongs, and I am not clever, like Theodora."

She looked very pretty and womanly as she stood smiling before him. His words had brought the color to her usually pale cheeks, and Hugh muttered,—

"No, thank God!" between his teeth as he pressed her hand, and, mounting, took the reins and was soon out of sight.

"What was Hugh saying to Ida, Theo?" her aunt asked, rather anxiously.

"Oh, they were mutually congratulating each other that they were not 'as other men are, or even as this publican,'—the publican in question being your humble servant."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"I? Oh, nothing;" and she quickly changed the subject.

The weeks grew to months, and Theodora was still at King's Gift. She had broached the subject of her departure more than once, but her aunt's look of appeal had silenced her, and it was not until March, when the country was beginning to bloom forth again with snowdrop, primrose, and violet, that a message of recall came from Mrs. Baskervyle, who had returned to the manor.

As Theodora was leaving, her aunt kissed her and said,—

"I gave your maid a small package to put into your box, my dear; it contains some jewels; I hope that you will wear them sometimes for my sake."

CHAPTER IV.

A SORE SUBJECT.

"Well, you're right,
I did not surely hate you yesterday;
And yet I do not love you enough to-day
To wed you, Cousin Romney."

E. B. Browning.

Seated by her bedroom fire the night of her return to the manor, Theo opened the package of which her aunt had spoken. The jewels which it contained gleamed bright in the firelight; they consisted of necklace and ear-rings, composed entirely of diamonds and sapphires, and Theo could not restrain a cry of admiration. A letter accompanied them, which ran as follows:

"I have seen the knowledge of my sad story in your face, my Theo. These jewels were given to me long years ago by your uncle Eustace, and are the last token of a love which, by virtue of its depth, truth, and sweetness, might have proved the joy of two human hearts,

but which, through the weakness and faithlessness of a miserable woman, became more cruel than the grave. I see in you, my child, the courage, truth, and tenderness which characterized him I loved so well, therefore I beg your acceptance of these jewels. I now approach a delicate subject; if I offend in so doing you must forgive me. Theodora, I am nothing to my son; the fault has been mine. I allowed him to drift farther and farther from me, in order to make his life happier, as I thought, and I lost his love. Alas! my husband and I were so divided that it was necessary for our children to choose between us, and I forced Hugh into his father's arms, whose one unselfish sentiment was his love for the boy. You and Hugh are eminently suited to each other. He admires you, I know; he would love you, I feel sure, if you would but allow him. If you could but consent to be my daughter I would welcome you with a mother's love; if not, you may be assured that I shall nevertheless remain

"Your loving aunt,

"THEODORA."

To say that the proposition with which this letter closed surprised Theo is but faintly to express her feelings. She wrote an answer before she slept that night, wording her refusal as gently as possible, but refusing most decidedly. "It's the most preposterous thing in life!" she said to herself. "What could Aunt Theo have been thinking of? Why, we never met without mutually standing on the defensive!"

She showed the jewels to her mother the following day. Mrs. Baskervyle flushed with pleasure.

"Did Hugh give you these? Am I to congratulate you, my dear?"

"Congratulate me? No," answered Theo, with asperity; "I know of no subject for congratulation."

"I thought, even hoped," continued her mother, unmindful of Theo's stern eyes, which were fixed upon her with displeasure, "that you and dear Hugh might have become more congenial to each other, after all, if only as the head of the house and your natural guardian. You should——"

"I want no guardian save Ethelbert," here interrupted Theo. "Hugh was from home during my visit, and had he passed every moment by my side it would only have been conducive to greater mutual repugnance. My aunt gave me the jewels; do you like them?"

"They are magnificent, and very valuable; but," with sudden alarm, "I hope they are not family jewels. Hugh would have a perfect right to claim them."

"You may be quite sure that my aunt would not present me with what was not hers to give," Theo said.

"My dear, one never knows. Your poor papa used to say that women could never be made to understand those things."

"Set your heart at rest, mamma; the jewels were given to my aunt long before her marriage."

"Are you quite sure? If they are heirlooms, they are not yours, but Hugh's."

"I tell you, mamma, they are my aunt's; there can be no possible argument on the subject," and affecting not to notice her mother's very evident intention of making out a case, were it only a supposable one, she hastily changed the subject.

The following summer was cold and damp, sufficiently so to depress the most light-hearted, and Theodora was utterly dejected and weary, above all of her mother's constant, never-ending plans for her future. The obnoxious subject was renewed again and again. Theodora would sit and listen as long as it was possible, with rage in her soul, and scorn in her gray eyes, answering in monosyllables only.

So long as her mother confined herself to generalities, she bore it, as the typical Spartan boy bore the fox gnawing at his vitals; but when she became personal, Theo rose in revolt.

"I must beg you, mamma, to drop the subject; you cannot imagine how repulsive it is to me. I am but nineteen, and really think that I might be allowed to wander 'in maiden meditation fancy free' a little longer. Colonel Throckmorton is the tenth man whom you have pronounced yourself ready to receive as a son-in-law; you have failed to remember that not one of them would be agreeable to me as a husband."

"You seem to take exceptions to everything I say, Theodora. As to men not being agreeable, once you are married, my dear, you will be obliged to find your husband agreeable," her mother said, with a Lord Burleighish nod.

"Then I may as well forswear matrimony; and, indeed, mamma, I am quite willing to talk on any other subject." This was said with a sigh; for, in truth, Theodora did not find the maternal conversation that "feast of reason and flow of soul" of which the poet sings.

"You will allow me the privilege of choosing my

own topic of conversation," said her mother, with suppressed resentment.

"Certainly," said Theo, coldly; "but I must say that I think it extremely undignified and perfectly useless."

"There, my dear, I always said so. Brought up in the perfectly ridiculous manner in which you have been, it is small wonder; taught Greek and Latin, and everything that was unnecessary, and incapable of conversing on the most ordinary subjects with any common sense. Your poor father——" Theo was exasperated in no small degree, and at the mention of her father's name poured out the vials of her wrath; she stood before her mother in a paroxysm of rage.

"Do not mention his name!" she said. "I do not wish to be disrespectful, but if you say another word I will leave the room. I will not hear that name spoken, save with honor, and I will not have the subject of my possible marriage discussed in my presence." Turning her back, she walked to the window, while Mrs. Baskervyle relapsed into tears.

Theo did not notice her for some time. When, however, she saw the tears she relented. Poor Theo! she was never very inexorable. Placing her hand on her mother's chair, she said, wearily, "I beg your pardon, mamma, if I have been rude, but you must have known that you were lashing me into fury. Don't cry; there is nothing to cry about," she continued, with almost a man's horror of tears.

Her mother looked up through all her tears. "You are so wrong-headed, Theo. If you don't marry, I should like to know what you are to do."

Indignant wrath was evidently unavailing. Theo only groaned, and with a hasty step left the room.

Ethelbert came home for a few weeks the latter part of the summer, and his genial presence filled the old house with warmth. He had decided on diplomacy as a future career, to his mother's intense satisfaction. Theo was, however, strongly opposed to the plan.

"You are not in any way fitted for such a profession," she objected, when her brother made known his intentions. "It is the last vocation I would have given you the credit for choosing, for it is so mean a one. I am sure that papa would have said the same," she added, as though that decided the matter once and for ever, as no doubt Theo thought that it should.

"Your father never made the slightest use of his opportunities or his family influence. Ethelbert is acting by advice of his cousin Hugh, who should be allowed to have some voice in the matter, as Bertie's success will greatly depend upon him."

"Oh! if success be Bertie's only ambition," sneered Theo.

"Of course, success is his only object. Really, Theodora, for a girl who considers herself so far above the average, you have less common sense than any one I ever knew. What motive do you expect your brother to be actuated by? What do all men strive for, save success? Because your poor father indulged in ridiculous and Quixotic scruples, you expect all other men to be equally absurd."

The latter part of this harangue was lost upon Theo, who, at the mention of her father's name, escaped from the room. Ethelbert, who followed her in a few min-

utes, found her pacing the hall with impatient steps. There was a melancholy cadence in her clear voice as she said,—

"I am so sorry, Bertie, for I know that a woman's quarrel alarms you beyond measure, but mother, of all people in the world, understands best the art of annoying me. Such altercations are not infrequent, but I thought that we might manage to avoid anything of the kind during your stay."

Bertie, whose alarm was not only sincere but natural (what, by all the gods, can one man do, shut up in the house with two women at variance with each other?), tried to laugh away his mother's words. But Theo was not to be cheated of her grievance.

"You would not find it so very amusing if you were obliged to hear it from one month's end to another."

"I don't suppose I should," laughed her brother, running his hand through his bright curls. "Poor old Theo! Well, dear, the best thing you can do is to marry."

"For heaven's sake, Bertie, *don't!*" exclaimed Theo, hastily withdrawing her arm from his, and holding up both hands as though warding off a blow. "If you begin upon that subject, I shall give up the ghost. It has been discussed from all points of view every day, nay, every hour, since my return from King's Gift; it is enough to make any girl take a vow of celibacy, and I would do so, if I could thereby hope to put mamma's matrimonial hobby-horse to flight once and forever."

"My dear child, I don't wish to urge your marrying, but if you don't get on with the 'Mater,' what else *can* you do?"

"All I beseech of you is, not to say 'marry' before mamma; it has been a *casus belli* for some time now, and life at the manor is not worth having, once hostilities commence. How much will my income be, Bertie, when I am of age?"

"About three hundred."

"Is that enough to live upon?"

"Yes," Bertie answered, rather doubtfully; "but you can't live alone, Theo."

"But I will live alone," said his sister; "the law could not stop me."

"No, but the law of society could; you are far too good-looking for such vagaries."

"I don't think that I shall allow society to interfere with my plans; as to my beauty, *it* will not cause me much trouble."

This was said with great scorn; indeed, Theo rated that appendage at its lowest possible value, and was as far removed from vanity as a young woman need be; it was one of the things which she could never be made to understand, and which so clearly demonstrated what her mother called "her utter want of common sense."

The year of mourning had passed, and Ethelbert began his reign by inviting some men down for the shooting. He was a very popular monarch,—much more so than his father, whose friends had been few, though stanch. Theo thought it rather too soon to fill the house with strangers; but what Bertie did was apt to be right in her eyes, and she interested herself in the preparations for the comfort and amusement of the expected guests. The brother and sister were very happy together during those few weeks. Theo was

quite satisfied with Bertie, and firmly believed that as he grew older he would begin to think more seriously on those subjects which seemed so all-important to her; and Ethelbert laughed at his sister's theories, and affirmed that marriage would make her a reasonable being. "She will be reconciled to the world as it is by the time she has three or four children, and be as ready to adopt her husband's views as she once was to mount every hobby of my father's and ride it to death," said this man of the world, as he loved to consider himself, though it would have been difficult to find a more thoroughly ingenuous youth.

Mrs. Baskervyle had never been an admirer of solitude, and welcomed the advent of her son's guests with much pleasure. "It will be an excellent thing for Theo to see something of the world before she makes her *débût;* and should there be any eligible man, she is quite old enough to marry, which would save me the expense of her presentation," she said to herself.

Poor Theo! it was well that she could not know what was passing in her mother's mind; had she been aware of Mrs. Baskervyle's plans it is to be feared that the eligible men would have found their host's handsome sister what some people, principally women, were wont to call her, "a very disagreeable girl."

CHAPTER V.

THE ELIGIBLE MAN.

"Alas! how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again."

THE party assembled at the manor consisted of three or four men friends of Ethelbert's, a pretty, young married woman, not above harmless flirtations, a stout dowager and her two plain daughters. Theodora had expostulated when she heard that an invitation had been extended to both.

"Really, mamma, you might have spared Bertie's friends the infliction of Alice and Mary Rutledge; one at a time is bad enough, and Cynthia Howard is so pretty and just the style of girl men like. I wish you could have left the thing to me."

"It is very fortunate for you, Theodora, that you have some one to arrange those matters. Miss Howard is very pretty and, as you say, attractive; but I had very excellent reasons for preferring the Rutledge girls as guests on this particular occasion."

"Mother is afraid that Cynthia will cut you out, sister mine," laughed Ethelbert, balancing himself with great nicety on the extreme edge of the table.

"I am sure that she is quite welcome; it would not be a Herculean task. I am a very unpopular girl."

"There is no occasion to tell us that, Theodora," said Mrs. Baskervyle, "though with your appearance there is not the slightest reason why it should be so."

"I would have preferred Ida Lyndall," Theodora murmured to her brother, when they were again alone. "She *can* be a lady, at least; and the Rutledge girls, with their continual ill-natured gossip about the people of their own miserable county, are enough to drive me out of my mind."

Bertie only grinned and whistled softly; perhaps he rather enjoyed Theo's impotent rage. When they arrived, however, she made the best of them with a wonderfully good grace. Bertie was so good-natured that the ugly girls generally fell to his share. Of the other men one was so enthusiastic a sportsman that man delighted him not, nor woman either. The two youngest men, as was natural, fell victims to Mrs. Mason, the "flirtatious" married woman, while Captain Fanshawe, the eldest man of the party, fell to Theo's share. He was one of those men of thirty-five or six who greatly affect very young girls. As he was well-bred and remarkably handsome, it must be confessed that Theo did not object to being thus singled out for his particular devotion.

Theo said to her brother, in her candid way, "I like your friend, Captain Fanshawe."

"Fanshawe is a very good fellow," was Bertie's answer, "but an awful devil where women are concerned. Only that I know you so well, Miss Theo, I should have thought twice about bringing him down here."

"He has kept the cloven foot carefully out of my

sight, Bertie, and I dare say, like many another, is not so black as he is painted. There is mamma complaining that Mrs. Mason is flirting outrageously, and a more harmless little woman does not exist."

"She is a bit of a flirt."

"Upon my word I have not noticed it; she is very good-natured, and tries to entertain those two boys. I, for my part, feel forever indebted to her; what should I have done with them unassisted?" said Theo, throwing up her hands in mock despair; and, indeed, she was so free from prejudice or malice herself, that, with all her cleverness, there was much that escaped her. Bertie respected his sister's innocence of heart, and allowed her to believe that she had convinced him; in fact, he was not in the smallest degree scandalized by Mrs. Mason's flirtations.

Theodora was one of those women who thoroughly understand that men naturally prefer the society of their own sex at times, and when it was suggested that the ladies should join the shooting party one day, put her veto upon it in the most decided manner; she was rewarded by a look of such deep gratitude from the sportsmen, that it was with difficulty she restrained a smile. The billiard-room was also forbidden ground after a certain hour in the evening; as she explained to the other ladies, "Imagine what a dreadful bore they would be to *us*, if we were obliged to be with them all day."

Perhaps in their secret souls they disagreed with her, but the "Misses Rutledge" remained discreetly silent, while Mrs. Mason said, "Yes, dear, you are always right; they are positively fatiguing," and curling herself up on the sofa, was soon fast asleep.

This *modus operandi* gained for Theo the sincere admiration of at least two of the men. The "Enthusiast" button-holed Captain Fanshawe, and sang her praises for quite ten minutes. "She is the most sensible young woman I ever met," was his concluding remark.

Captain Fanshawe was inclined to agree with him, but he only said, "She is a remarkably handsome young woman."

The sportsman looked puzzled, and tried to read his features. They entered at this moment a capital piece of stubble, when the dogs suddenly coming to a "point," drove all recollection of Theo from his mind; but as he dressed for dinner he again repeated, "The most sensible young woman I know, by Jove."

Theodora and her brother were standing one morning watching the departure of the sportsmen; Bertie, much against his will, was devoting the day to his agent and lawyer. He broke the silence, as the dog-cart disappeared, with, "Theodora, you must be more careful with Fanshawe. Now don't fly into a rage," as his sister looked up angrily; "I know that you simply enjoy his conversation, but you have gensdarmed" (Ethelbert had a way of coining words) "to such an extent over these other women, that when you paced the terrace for two hours with him yesterday, they tried to make themselves disagreeable."

"I hope they succeeded," said Theo, in a tone of intense annoyance.

"They did, my dear. Take my advice, hold your long confabulations in the drawing-room, under the eyes of the 'Mater' and Mrs. Rutledge."

"But I have promised to walk with him to-morrow morning."

"Make some excuse,—say that you have a headache."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I shall go for a walk, and you must come with me."

Ethelbert was horrified. "Is it a gooseberry ye take me for?" he said, affecting a strong Irish accent. "Nay, sister mine, anything but that."

"Then I shall simply state the case, telling him my brother finds our solitude '*à deux*' improper."

"No you won't: but I must be off. You are not angry?"

"Not in the least," answered his sister; but her hasty step and heightened color belied her words.

Captain Fanshawe came up to where she stood, the following morning, hat in hand. "I come to claim your promise, Miss Baskervyle."

"I am dreadfully sorry," she said, looking him full in the face, without a shadow of *mauvaise honte* in her clear gray eyes, "I cannot keep it." Then, lowering her voice, she continued, "Those women have been making unkind remarks about us," with a look of intense scorn directed towards the unconscious group at the other end of the room. "Bertie has begged me to give them no occasion for gossip."

"Upon my word, I fail to see that anything you have done could have possibly made such a warning necessary. If you take my advice, Miss Baskervyle, you will nip anything in the way of interference in the bud; otherwise you will be a martyr to Master Bertie's caprices."

Such is the perversity of human nature that, although quite capable of saying the same thing, this remark

caused Theo great annoyance. How dare he come between Bertie and herself!

"Ethelbert has a perfect right to offer his advice, and I would do a great deal more than that to please him," she said, coldly.

Unmindful of her change of tone, he asked, with a significant look,—

"Do you never walk in the garden of a morning?"

"You mean, Will I do so, without my brother's knowledge?" she said, fiercely, looking him straight in the eyes, her own bright with anger. "No! I am aware that men expect those kind of meannesses from women, but I have never descended to that style of thing yet, and I do not intend to begin it now." With the air of an injured queen she left the room.

Captain Fanshawe stood for a moment looking after her; he had never seen her so handsome, and was surprised into honest admiration. He was not alarmed, as poor Ethelbert would have been under similar circumstances, for he had a lively faith in his own powers where women were concerned; but he was struck by the girl's honest indignation at the mere suggestion of deceit. For one moment the thought had crossed his mind that it was a clever bit of acting, but one look at the girl's face convinced even him, hard and worldly man as he was, that she spoke only the true sentiments of her heart.

He wandered into the library and sat there musing for an hour or more,—a very unusual occupation; he had not thought deeply, perhaps for years, of his careless, useless existence. The result was that at the expiration of that time he rose from the arm-chair in

which he had thrown himself, exclaiming, "By God! I'll do it; a man must marry sooner or later, and she's a girl one won't to have to watch. I'll go to the mother, and snub that young prig Ethelbert." For one moment he appeared lost in thought; a shadow of sadness, perhaps impatience would be a better word, passed over his face. "There will be a scene with Edith," he said, with a sigh, "but I can't help that."

I know not what motive actuated Alfred Fanshawe when he asked Theodora's hand in marriage; perhaps he promised himself some pleasure in the fact that ownership would give him the power to crush that proud spirit, or it may have been a simple wish to possess that which so commanded his admiration. All his ill-spent life he had known no desire ungratified, and in the gratification of those desires he had considered the comfort, happiness, or caprice of but one human being, Captain Alfred Fanshawe. Where was my Theo's guardian angel when this earth-born creature found his way to her pure heart?

It must be owned that Captain Fanshawe's manner was perfection as he kissed Mrs. Baskervyle's hand and thanked her for her permission, which had been readily accorded, to make known to her daughter what he was pleased to term his deep affection. Mrs. Baskervyle was very gracious. She had been privately informed that his position was all that could be desired; his income was more than sufficient for all his wants; and, moreover, his elder brother, the colonel of a regiment quartered in India, was married but childless, —a fact which warranted many blissful hopes on the part of his brother and heir.

"I am very much obliged to you for first coming to me; they tell me that the time-honored custom of so doing is almost obsolete. You have my full consent, Captain Fanshawe, and my best wishes for success," were Mrs. Baskervyle's words, spoken with great dignity. It was then that the hand-kissing took place of which I have spoken, and the happy lover went forth in search of his "faire ladye." He had not far to seek. Theo was sitting curled up on one of the low window-seats of the lobby, where she had taken refuge, having been driven from the drawing-room by the elder Miss Rutledge, who, prompted by the marvellous ambition which seems to inspire persons possessed of the smallest of voices, was attempting a song to which Patti could have done no more than justice. Alfred Fanshawe caught sight of the heavy folds of her black dress, and came forward, his hand outstretched and a beseeching look in his eyes, which were very beautiful, deep, tender, and blue.

"Miss Baskervyle, will you forgive me?" He spoke very simply, and with a straightforward honesty which he was well aware would make a deep impression on Theo.

With equal candor she said, "I had forgotten all about it," as she placed her hand in his. He stood for a moment holding it in both his own. In truth he found it less easy to deal with the daughter than with the mother. It was for a moment, and then Theo with sudden inspiration divined his intention and withdrew her hand with some embarrassment.

Scenes of somewhat the same character, at least he classed them together in his own mind, though with a

different object in view, had been too frequent in Alfred Fanshawe's life for his self-control to leave him for long. He placed himself by her side, and, possessing himself again of her hand, said gravely,—

"Don't take it from me again, Theodora. Cannot you give it to me for my own? Don't answer for one moment. Let me tell you that I love you. Had I known more women like you, Theo, I should not have led the wild life I have been leading for some years past."

I think that the devil himself must have inspired those words for our Theo's undoing. Nothing he could have said would have moved her so deeply. She was touched in her weakest spot. She had always longed so ardently to live a life brighter, nobler than were the lives of other women, and her heart beat wildly for a few moments. Here at last was one who appreciated her, one who knew to the core the hearts of men and women, and he was willing, even eager, to place his life in her hands. He had come to her for help, with the acknowledgment of her superiority on his lips. It was the weak point in her armor. Ah! the pity of it, that by the merest chance he should have found the way to her heart through her pride. She looked up at him earnestly.

"If I can help you," she said. "I have been so little to any one since papa died——" and her voice broke down with a sob. All the loneliness of that past year was in its tender tones. She was such a child after all, he might have spared her. But Alfred was charmed. Hitherto he had only seen her in her strength; but now she sat beside him, her hand lying

passively in his, her gray eyes full of unshed tears, tender, gentle, womanly, and yet somehow so different from all other women, and therein lay the charm, the novelty which means so much to men, so little to women. He bent forward and kissed the tears from her eyes, saying, "You have made me so happy, my dearest! I am a different man already." And indeed, for about ten minutes he did consider himself a reformed character.

They sat talking for a long time, regardless of the gong which summoned them to luncheon, and until Mrs. Baskervyle's curiosity overcame her good-natured scruples, and she came to seek them. "You naughty children!" she exclaimed, with a motherly air; "I have been looking everywhere for you, dearest Theodora. I see by your face that it is all settled." And she embraced her daughter with effusion. "Come, now, into my boudoir, and I will send Berry for a glass of wine and a biscuit."

In fact, they were both petted and made much of. Her daughter's engagement was an event in her somewhat monotonous life, and she was really glad to see Theo happy again. If the thought did cross her mind that it was a very excellent thing to be spared the expenses of a house in London for the season and the court dresses necessary for herself and Theodora, it was but her nature, and we all have our peculiarities.

"Shall we keep our secret a little longer?" asked Mrs. Baskervyle of her daughter, as she was leaving the room in order to dress for dinner.

"Not on my account," was the somewhat unconventional answer. "Only don't expect me to announce it to all those people down-stairs, who don't care the least

in their heart of hearts; it will be bad enough to listen with patience to their congratulations."

"Yes, let us make a clean breast of it; that will prevent any surmises and ill-nature," said Captain Fanshawe.

"I was sure that you would have said so!" exclaimed Theo. "It has always seemed to me the worst possible compliment that a woman can pay a man to whom she engages herself, when she is backward in acknowledging it."

Alfred smiled with the self-satisfied air of a man whom a beautiful woman delighted to honor.

"I will tell Bertie, mamma," said Theo, looking over her shoulder, as she passed from the room. Mrs. Baskervyle made no answer, but waylaying Ethelbert on his way to his room, confided in him. Her news seemed too heavy for her, and had Theo insisted upon silence I think that, like a certain barber, she would have been reduced to whispering it to the reeds.

Words are weak to describe Bertie's consternation. His friends were all the "best fellows in the world," but when it came to one of them suddenly being proposed as a brother-in-law, the matter assumed quite another aspect.

"It's d—n nonsense," he exclaimed, in the first gust of surprise. "Theo is a great deal too young yet; she has never seen half a dozen men in her life. You should have prevented it."

"My dear Ethelbert, there is nothing against him."

"Against him, no; only he is a fast man about town, and I know very little about him."

"I thought it well to inquire," acknowledged his

mother, with something of a blush. "And I find the Fanshawes are of the best country families of —— shire, and Alfred has three thousand a year and expectations from his brother, who has no children. You'll break Theo's heart if you oppose it, Bertie," she said, coaxingly; "and she is really greatly attached to him."

"Greatly attached to him!" repeated Ethelbert, with a whole volume of scorn in his voice. "A fellow she's only known for three weeks!" And he walked off in a rage, for men must dine, and custom says must dine habited in evening dress.

He watched Theo with gloomy eyes during dinner. She was so unaffectedly happy, that when she came up to him, later in the evening, to share her news, he had not the heart to lessen her pleasure, though he sighed when he kissed her, and his voice trembled as he murmured a "God bless you!"

Theodora stood before her father's portrait, which hung by her bedside. She had that moment parted from her lover, and a tender smile trembled on her parted lips.

"I wish that you had known him," she said, as she stood studying the dear old face. "Dear papa, do you know how happy I am?" The portrait had no answering smile for her, and its eyes looked out at her so mournfully that tears came into her own.

He had said, "I may be called upon to resign my power." Could he have saved her from the future that lay before her, had he been spared to her? Alas! we can only weep and pray for those we love.

CHAPTER VI.

A FALSE GOD.

"The rite-book is closed, and the rite being done
They who knelt down together arise up as one.
Fair riseth the bride; oh, a fair bride is she."

E. B. BROWNING.

THEO received a kind letter of congratulation from Lady Atherling, which concluded with these words: "I shall expect to have news for you concerning Ida and our young rector, whom you perhaps remember. She has been of the greatest assistance to him in his parish work, which has naturally brought them much in contact one with another. To you and you alone I will acknowledge that this has relieved me of some anxiety regarding Hugh. Perhaps I wronged Ida, but during his last visit there seemed to be an almost imperceptible change in her manner towards him. I trust that I am not uncharitable, Theo, but the truth has forced itself upon my mind that poor Ida is not so entirely sincere as I had hoped. I love my son so dearly that I could not bear to see him united to one less noble than himself. I am very proud of my dear son, Theodora. You have heard, I suppose, how great has been his success. Would that he could know how fondly his mother's heart clings to him!"

Theodora never told her lover of her aunt's matrimonial projects for her, some instinct telling her that

he would be better pleased to suppose himself the sole aspirant to her favor.

December was now near at hand, and the manor was at last free of guests. Alfred had been the last to leave, promising to return for Christmas week. Mrs. Baskervyle came into the breakfast-room, an open letter in her hand. "Good-morning, Theodora. Hugh has been most kind; here is a letter in which he offers the house in Eaton Square, and proposes sending the servants from King's Gift. I call it so exceedingly kind."

"I would greatly prefer being married quietly at the village church," said Theo. "Hugh is very good, but such a display seems to me unnecessary."

"Nonsense, Theodora! you must be married as becomes your father's daughter. It would be impossible to invite any one save the nearest connections of either family. This house is so small, and the whole thing would be a failure."

"There won't be a soul in London in February, mamma, and I had it so nicely arranged with Cynthia Howard and Mabel Baskervyle for bridesmaids, and dear old Mr. Howard to perform the ceremony. It was the original arrangement, mamma. I wish that you would keep to it."

"My dear Theodora, you cannot possibly ask Miss Howard to be one of the bridesmaids," exclaimed her mother, in sincere alarm. "How do you suppose Lord Hightower's daughters will appreciate being invited to act as bridesmaids with a country clergyman's daughter?"

"I don't care how they may like it. I've asked Cynthia to be my bridesmaid, and I shall certainly not

alter my plans to please them. If they are such snobs as to object to her on the score of her being only a clergyman's daughter, though they are Alfred's cousins I should prefer dispensing with their services. And what is more," she continued, angrily, "if my aunt considers Mabel too young for the proud position, Cynthia shall be first bridesmaid."

Mrs. Baskervyle was thankful to be able to tell her that Hugh had communicated his mother's permission to Mabel's premature appearance in society for that occasion only.

"You will ask Hugh to give you away?" said her mother.

"Hugh has been very kind, but I consider that Ethelbert has the first right," was Theo's ultimatum.

True to his promise, Alfred arrived at the manor a few days before Christmas-day. Ethelbert, who was not over well pleased to find that he was of secondary importance since the adoption of a future son-in-law, excused himself as best he might, and accepted Hugh's invitation to eat his Christmas dinner at King's Gift.

Alfred, however, was a host in himself, and delighted Theodora by agreeing with her as to the propriety of inviting Cynthia Howard to be bridesmaid.

Theodora often looked back on that week as the most blissful of her whole existence. No shadow crossed her young life as yet. Her faith in the future was as strong as youth and love could make it. Her bright smile and unaffected happiness were contagious, and even Mrs. Baskervyle forgot her grievances. If Theo had not been very much in love with her affianced husband before that Christmas week, she certainly was

in a very hopeless case as she stood watching the dog-cart out of sight which conveyed him to the station. The parting did not affect her lover to the same extent. He had already asked himself more than once if Theodora's intensity would not be rather a bore. He kept these doubts carefully hidden from his fiancée, and was in all that he did and said the most perfect lover possible.

Cynthia Howard accompanied them to London, rather to Mrs. Baskervyle's annoyance. When, however, she found that her advice would not prevail, she contented herself with determining to snub the young person in the future, and in the mean time endured her presence with some philosophy, perhaps reconciled thereto by the fact that Cynthia was useful as a chaperon for Theodora during her mother's innumerable shopping expeditions, which occupied her entire mornings for the few weeks which preceded Theodora's marriage. On her return one morning she found Theodora and Cynthia moved to tears by inordinate laughter. Mrs. Baskervyle stood for a moment in the doorway overcome by surprise. "What in the world is the matter, Theodora?"

"Oh, mamma!" said Theo, as soon as she could command her voice sufficiently, wiping the tears from her eyes, "they have been here."

"Who have been here?" asked Mrs. Baskervyle.

"Lady Hightower and my bridesmaids. Such girls! *Girls!*" repeated Theo, "the name might have described them in the early part of the century. They have red hair, they are about two feet taller than myself, and oh, mamma! why did you insist upon white

and blue for the bridesmaids? Cynthia, Cynthia, picture them to yourself walking up the aisle behind two such fairies as Mabel and yourself, arrayed in innocent white muslin, with blue sashes. It will make the whole thing risible."

"Theodora," said her mother, seriously, "is this true? How can you be so heartless?" The poor woman was nearly reduced to tears.

"Never mind, my mater," Theo said, consolingly; "I dare say that my account was slightly exaggerated. The Misses Gauntley are certainly not quite two feet higher than I, and perhaps the younger is not more than twice Mabel's age. As to red hair, it's fashionable now. The sight of them caused a shock to my feelings which I shall never recover."

"Dear Mrs. Baskervyle," here interrupted Cynthia, in her bird-like voice, "Theo is very naughty. They are tall, certainly, and not exactly graceful, but the younger is quite pretty." This assertion surprised Theo into gravity; during Cynthia's consolatory speech she had been sitting mopping her eyes helplessly.

"Cynthia Howard, where do you expect to go to when you die? You, the daughter of a clergyman, too! What is the use of buoying poor mamma up with false hopes? Every word I have said is true, mater; they are not seven feet eight inches in height, as I led you to suppose, but they are both over thirty, and there is no doubt as to the color of their hair."

"The color of whose hair?" asked some one from the doorway. Looking up, they saw Lord Atherling, who had dropped in for five o'clock tea, as he sometimes did.

"Hugh," said Theo, with great solemnity, "the programme has been materially changed. That lovely point-lace veil which you have ordered will never adorn this brow. On Thursday next I shall clothe myself in my white serge gaberdine, enter a hansom cab with Alfred; Cynthia and Bertie will follow in another, and you and mamma will bring up the rear, always in a hansom cab. We will drive to St. George's, Hanover Square, where the rector and clerk will be in attendance. Alfred will there take me to be his wedded wife, and I shall take him, Alfred, to be my wedded husband. Then we will come back here, and all go to the theatre in the evening."

The cause of this wild speech being explained to Hugh, he was very much disposed to join in Theodora's hilarity. Mrs. Baskervyle's melancholy was, however, so unfeigned that it recalled him to himself.

"I thought that you were above such minor points as mere good looks, Theodora."

"So I am, Hugh, as a general thing, but one likes to be married decently; and really I feel for them more than for myself. There should be a law preventing people from making themselves ridiculous."

"You would find some difficulty as to who should be judge," said his lordship, dryly.

"You should be judge, King Solomon," said Theo, laughing. "I'm sure, Hugh, that you never permitted yourself any absurdities, even in your most halcyon days, before ever you became one of the lights of the British Parliament."

"Not even when I suggested to my mother the writing of a certain letter, about a year ago?"

Theo crimsoned, but silenced him with a warning look. When they were alone for a few moments that evening Lord Atherling repeated his question, and Theo then answered frankly, as was her nature, "It was absurd, Hugh, and I shall never understand how it was that you conceived anything so preposterous. You certainly never had the slightest love for me."

"I have never acknowledged that a very intense affection is necessary for happiness in married life. It seems to me that it generally terminates in disappointment on both sides."

"You are quite, quite wrong," said Theo, with great energy. "Dear Hugh, I beg of you do not let such a mistaken idea influence you. If I were not sure that I loved Alfred with all my heart and soul and strength, I would not marry him for any consideration in the whole world."

"Do you love him so very much?" Hugh asked, looking down upon her very wistfully.

"Indeed I do," answered Theo, a world of tenderness in her clear eyes. "And I look forward to such a different life from the purposeless existence which I have hitherto led. I shall be so free to act now, and I have such a splendid scheme for the education of girls, which, if I can only carry out, will, I hope, do great good, and with Alfred's help I shall hope to achieve something at last."

"Fanshawe does not seem to be the kind of man who would be as deeply interested in your philanthropic projects as you seem to imagine."

"Ah! but he is," said Theo, decidedly. "More so than any one I know."

Lord Atherling had his own opinion on the subject, but, true to his usual line of conduct, deemed non-interference the wisest course. "She will be guided by him once she is married," he said to himself.

The wedding morning dawned wonderfully bright and warm considering the time of the year. Presents, which filled Mrs. Baskervyle's truly womanly soul with delight, came in large numbers. Lady Atherling's gift had been a service of silver, which commanded the praise of the only connoisseur of the household, Briggs, the butler. And Lord Atherling begged Theo's acceptance of a Victoria—they were called "phaetons" in those days—and a pair of ponies, which really delighted his cousin. Nor were Alfred Fanshawe's relations backward. Theo had suggested blue hats instead of white, and Mrs. Baskervyle was relieved to find that the Misses Gauntley were, upon the whole, improved with these adornments. As they sailed up the aisle, she whispered to Lady Atherling, "They really look wonderfully well."

Lady Atherling did not answer; her eyes were fixed upon Theo, who, leaning on Hugh's arm, walked with a firm step towards the altar, and upon Cynthia Howard and her own daughter, who were perfect visions of beauty.

It had been decided after all that Lord Atherling should give the bride away, Alfred having declared, at the instigation of Mrs. Baskervyle, that there was no one whose services as best man could be requested save Ethelbert. Every one said that it was an exquisite wedding. To Theo it seemed a vision of gay dresses, white favors, tears, shed as was proper by Mrs. Basker-

vyle, and incomprehensible wedding-breakfast speeches. She did not breathe freely until she retired with Lady Atherling and her bridesmaids to change her dress preparatory to departure.

"Thank God, it is over!" she said, as she sank back into an easy-chair.

The Misses Gauntley exchanged glances, but the scandalized expression of each elderly virgin was entirely lost upon Theo. Upon the whole the conduct of Alfred's bride did not particularly please his relatives; she neither blushed nor wept, and received their congratulations with the most self-possessed smile, and showed a calm and happy face at the carriage-window as they drove away amid a shower of white satin slippers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE.

> "Lest all who love and choose him
> See Love, and so refuse him;
> For all who find him lose him,
> But all have found him fair."
>
> A. C. SWINBURNE.

"GUESS who is to be married, Alfred?" asked Theodora, sitting one morning over a late breakfast, and glancing up as she spoke from a whole package of letters which had that morning arrived from Paris, having been forwarded to Dresden, where they now found themselves some six weeks after their marriage.

"Give it up," answered her husband. "I never guessed anything in my life. Not your mother?"

"Alfred!" said Theodora, with a shocked intonation, "how absurd you are. It is Cynthia Howard."

"What! your beautiful bridesmaid? Not very surprising. I only wonder that she has been allowed to blush unseen for so long a time. Who is the happy man?"

"Jack Trowbridge: you remember him,—that tall, awkward young fellow, a friend of Bertie's. He called once or twice before our marriage."

"Oh, yes; I remember the man. I noticed at the time that your little friend seemed to make eyes at him."

"Make eyes at him!" Theo repeated, scornfully. "How can you, Alfred? I am sure Cynthia never did anything so vulgar. It seems that he made a confidant of Bertie, who invited him down to the manor, and there it was all settled. They are to be married on the 3d of April, and then come abroad. I dare say that we shall meet."

"Upon the whole, Miss Cynthia has done pretty well for herself," said her husband, in a tone of inquiry.

"I don't know how she could have ever fancied him," said Theo, glancing across the table at her own husband, and mentally comparing him with honest Jack Trowbridge. "I dare say that his position is superior to Cynthia's, and I believe that his father allows him a very good income, but he is in the Guards, and that is so dreadfully expensive. I am half disappointed, for he always seemed so wofully uninteresting to me. You have no idea how clever and amusing Cynthia can be when she chooses."

As spring approached Theo was seized with a longing for England, and though it involved a presentation at court on her marriage,—a ceremony which she pronounced senseless and useless,—a desire for one look at the sweet English hedgerows was so strong that she submitted to the infliction with a tolerably good grace. They met the Trowbridges at Aix-la-Chapelle on their homeward journey. Cynthia was handsomer than ever, and arrayed in the most perfect Paris dresses, which well became her dainty style of face and figure.

"I never realized how very pretty you were before,"

said Theo, surveying her from head to foot with honest admiration. "You are like an exquisite little bit of porcelain."

"Dearest Theodora, don't look at me; let me rather look at you. What have you been doing all these months?"

Then followed many confidences, especially on the part of Mrs. Trowbridge, who discussed her past and future life with a great appearance of candor.

"Jack wants to sell out, but I have persuaded him to do nothing of the kind. What in the world should I do with him on my hands all day? I shall live in London, and, of course, he will be with me as much as possible, Windsor being so near. His father is to allow him a thousand a year. It is very little, to be sure; simply, he must make his pay cover his own personal expenses. Papa has promised me fifty pounds a year for pin-money. I think that he might have made it more, and I have two thousand pounds of my own which poor mamma left. I shall spend that in two years' time. Once well *lancée* in society, which one cannot be without spending *some* money, even a small income will suffice to keep one's head above water."

Theodora listened in amazement. Was it possible that a few short months could so alter a girl who, up to that time, had known no life save that of her father's parsonage, and tasted but such modest joys as are attainable when the income does not exceed five hundred a year?

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "you must not be bitten by an ambitious desire to shine in the great world. The game is not worth the candle; and if you

have children you will have quite enough on your hands without society."

"Children!" almost shrieked Mrs. Trowbridge. "My dear Theodora, how dreadfully old-fashioned you are in your ideas!"

Theodora said nothing, but when they parted she whispered to her friend, "Don't let the world spoil you, dear little Cynthia."

Mrs. Trowbridge only laughed.

"I am afraid that she is getting worldly," Theo said to her husband, with a sigh, as the train moved out of the station.

"Nonsense, Theodora; you are far too much inclined to find fault with people when they don't happen to come up to your preconceived idea of them,—placing them on a pinnacle, and disgusted if they find it a disagreeable resting-place." He spoke in a tone of such genuine annoyance that Theodora looked up surprised.

"I should be very sorry to do her an injustice," she said, gravely; "but I thought that she had adopted a strangely worldly tone, upon some subjects at least."

"My dear child, you would like to model every one after yourself."

Theodora indignantly disclaimed any such desire.

"It would be extremely monotonous," said she.

"Very!" replied Alfred, laconically.

There the conversation ended, but it left a disagreeable impression on Theodora. "He is dissatisfied with me," she thought, "and without reason."

The London season had begun with more than its accustomed splendor, and Theodora's appearance on the

occasion of her presentation and at the drawing-room satisfied even Alfred, who was charmed by the universal homage which was paid her.

Happiness is a great beautifier, and it was small wonder that this fresh young creature, beautiful with youth, health, and intelligence, created something of a sensation even in the great London world.

Theodora was pleased, flattered, and finally bored.

"Let us go to the manor for a few weeks," she said to her husband. "I came home with such a longing for our sweet English country, and we have been gazing out on these dreary London streets ever since. The parks are a snare and a delusion; all the trees look as though they wanted washing. Do, Alfred, take me to mamma for just one week."

Alfred consented with apparent good grace. He had his own reasons for finding London less agreeable than usual, for he caught sight of two sad eyes watching him from afar more than once during his morning rides with Theo. Alas! such mournful eyes as they were, and how suddenly the bloom had faded from that soft, childlike face!

The manor was the same dear old place. Theodora could hardly restrain her impatience, and jumped from the carriage to shake hands with the old gardener and his wife, who stood at the lodge-gate to welcome her. Mrs. Baskervyle was charmed; she had missed her daughter more than she had thought possible, and was quite prepared to enjoy her exceedingly, now that she had done with all responsibility. She had a thousand questions to ask and innumerable grievances to pour into Theo's ear before nightfall.

"And you met dear Cynthia," she said, at dinner.

"*Dear* Cynthia!" said Theo, with a very marked emphasis on the adjective. "Since when so dear?"

"Theodora," said her mother, severely, "I always thought her a charming girl, and the best possible friend for you."

"I am delighted to hear you speak so," laughed Theodora, with the queerest little grimace at her husband across the table. "But your sentiments have certainly changed in the most remarkable manner."

"That is because I know her so well now. I saw a great deal of her during her engagement, and really her views on life and society are so sensible that she quite won my heart; and she has made an excellent marriage, and deserves the greatest credit."

"In fact, she is successful," said Theo, with an amused look.

"Just so," answered Mrs. Baskervyle, upon whom satire was wasted.

Before two weeks had elapsed Alfred had grown wofully tired of life at the manor, and Theo awoke to the fact that he was dreadfully indifferent to the well-being of her poor people. She hid her chagrin as well as she could, trying to hide from herself how utterly dissimilar were their tastes. She was not surprised, however, one morning, when Alfred said, throwing down the *Times*,—

"I tell you what it is, Theo, a little of this kind of thing goes a long way."

"What kind of thing?" asked his wife, though she knew pretty well what was coming.

"Reading this infernal paper all the morning, and yawning my head nearly off all the afternoon."

"Why did you not tell me before?" exclaimed Theo, flushing painfully. "I did not know that you were bored. Where shall we go? I can be ready at a moment's notice."

"What would you say to going to Baden-Baden for the races?"

"I have never seen a race. I would like it of all things. They say it is an exquisite place."

"That's all right," said Alfred, jumping up with wonderful alacrity; "we'll be off on Friday. Just tell your mother." And he was out of the room before his wife could speak, giving orders to his servant as to the packing of his portmanteau.

The middle of July, therefore, found them established in one of the large hotels overlooking the gardens of the Maison de Conversation. The morning after their arrival Theodora was surprised by a visit from Mrs. Trowbridge, who rushed into her friend's arms, exclaiming, "You delightful creatures, I am so charmed to see you! We have been here for three whole days, and though the place is crowded, hardly a person one knows. I have nearly died of ennui, and Jack has played French billiards until he has worn out nearly half the billiard-tables in town. We have hired a sweet little phaeton and a pair of ponies. They belong to a Russian prince with some fearful name. He has gone off, leaving all his bills unpaid; so the stable-keeper, a vindictive creature, revenges himself by letting us the ponies for so much a week. I drive, and Jack whips, because I am not strong enough to make them feel it."

And she held up two tiny hands in a pretty, helpless way.

The days passed very pleasantly for the two young couples. Cynthia was the brightest creature in the world, and rattled on with a volubility which surprised Theo, who had found her rather shy in the old days. The ponies were very useful, for Mrs. Trowbridge declared walking perfectly impossible. "I never can understand what marvellous instinct prompts those people who climb mountains and walk unheard-of distances for the sake of a view which, when they arrive, they are too dead tired to enjoy," she said. "All the exercise that I need I can take on the promenade of an evening."

So it fell out that Theodora and Jack were the pedestrians on most occasions, while Alfred took Jack's place, not unwillingly, by Cynthia's side.

"I must have some one to whip," the little lady explained; "and dear Jack does so enjoy a walk."

Theodora conceived a real liking for Jack. His honest, tender love for his wife, and his entire, unquestioning faith in her superiority over all other human beings, touched and pleased her; she encouraged him in his ingenuous confessions of faith, and won his heart by her ready acquiescence whenever the subject of Cynthia's perfections was brought forward, as it was, in truth, apropos to most things.

They made an excursion one evening to the old castle. Mrs. Trowbridge professed herself half dead with fatigue ere they reached their destination. They were well repaid, however, by a view over one of the fairest landscapes of Europe. The shades of evening softened

without obscuring the surrounding country. The old castle stood firm yet, though almost vanquished by its enemy, time, which, however, had dealt tenderly with it, only increasing its beauty and making it a pleasant thing for the eyes to rest upon. There was an Æolian harp up in the tower somewhere, which gave out low notes as the gentle wind rose and fell. Theodora was delighted.

"How charming this is!" she said; "it is such a relief after all those would-be gay people in the town. I'm afraid that we have not escaped them entirely. I certainly caught sight of a man just now. Oh, there he is again!"

"I know that fellow," said her husband, with the unwonted enthusiasm of English acquaintances when they meet abroad; and he hastened to greet the stranger, who advanced with outstretched hand. "How are you, Oldham? delighted to see you!"

A general introduction followed. Mr. Oldham seemed inclined to attach himself to Theo, but she was dreamy and disinclined for conversation, and when they were preparing to leave the castle no one noticed that he had disappeared. Theo took her husband's arm: much as she liked honest Jack, his conversation was not exhilarating, and a little of it went a long way. This arrangement did not suit Mrs. Trowbridge, to whom a *tête-à-tête* with her husband seemed a fearful waste of time. She gave a little scream, therefore, as they came to a turn in the path.

"What a fearfully steep place! I shall fall, I know that I shall. Dear Theo, do you mind allowing Captain Fanshawe to help me down? Jack is no surer-footed

than I, and when I am down I will send them back for you."

"Thank you, my dear," said Theo, with rather an amused smile, "I am quite able to walk unassisted. Alfred will help you with all the pleasure in life."

Alfred went forward with alacrity and Theo followed alone, with something like a sneer on her cold face. Cynthia's little coquetries were very ridiculous, certainly, but in her heart she felt so far above them that they did not even annoy her.

"May I offer you my arm, Mrs. Fanshawe?" said a voice by her side. She turned quickly, and recognized her husband's friend, Mr. Oldham.

"No, I thank you. I am very independent in those things, being so strong."

"You are the first woman whom I have ever heard acknowledge to physical strength. Those who have no actual malady to boast of generally create an imaginary one."

"Yes, there is a great deal of that kind of thing. I suppose the principal cause of it is that women's lives are so utterly void of anything like real usefulness that they are obliged to make self the one all-engrossing subject of thought. I have always had a special horror of anything of the kind. You see we are all so wonderfully interesting to ourselves, that a malady to nurse, and a doctor to discuss the important subject with, are both very tempting, and require a certain amount of self-denial to withstand."

They walked on in silence for some time, and Theo had leisure to examine her companion. He was a tall, dark man, with earnest eyes and stern brows. His was

a good face, though far from handsome, or indeed in any way attractive. "He looks like a gentleman," was Theo's mental observation as she withdrew her eyes.

Jack presently joined them, saying that Cynthia was afraid to be left alone but would wait for them.

"Dear little thing!" he said, tenderly. "She is so timid I never leave her alone."

Theo saw a gleam of amusement in Mr. Oldham's eyes, which she resented. "You are quite right, Mr. Trowbridge," she said, quietly; "little Cynthia is too delicate a blossom not to need every care."

They overtook Alfred and Cynthia as they entered the town, but Mr. Oldham only resigned his place by Theo's side as they reached the Hôtel de Hollande.

"I am at the Victoria, Fanshawe," he said, as he raised his hat to the ladies. "You must come over and look me up."

"Thanks," said Alfred, without, however, promising to do so, as he followed his wife into the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

TREACHERY.

"Oh, truth! thy possession is a heavy burden."

A LARGE ball was given at the Assembly Rooms the following night, which Theo rather unwillingly attended.

"I will go, dear," she had said to her husband, "since you wish it, but as I do not dance I am sure to be bored."

"I don't see the necessity," he answered. "You are perfectly right in not dancing; it would not suit your style."

Cynthia was radiant. "The Guards don't dance;" Jack therefore took up his position behind Theo's chair, quite contented with the sight of his beautiful wife flying round and round the room in Alfred Fanshawe's arms.

"How beautifully Cynthia dances!" he said to Theo.

"Indeed she does, and it came naturally to her. We had an old dancing-mistress twice a week at the manor when we were children. Cynthia and Ethelbert were never tired of practising, while I used to sit in the window and read. The poor old woman went nearly frantic over me and complained to mamma, but, with my usual *brusquerie*, I said that I was not going to make a fool of myself. Good-evening, Mr. Oldham. I am entertaining Mr. Trowbridge with reminiscences of my youth. It seems quite two hundred years ago."

"So I should imagine," said Oldham, looking down at her with a kind smile. "Are you such an old, old creature as to forswear dancing?"

"From my earliest youth I abhorred all such exercise. My husband says that it would be quite out of character, so I begin to think that my instincts were right. I have always tried to desist from doing anything which I am aware I shall never do well. Look at that female in blue; how she and her partner jolt and bob! Ah! well steered, Alfred!" as the unfortunate couple who were the subject of her criticism floundered directly across the path of Cynthia and Alfred as they glided easily and swiftly through the maze of dancers.

Mr. Oldham seated himself by her side; he was rather silent, and Theo noticed that his eyes followed her husband as with Cynthia on his arm he passed and repassed them.

"What an ethereal little person your friend is," he said, as Jack, tired of inaction, moved away. "It is evidently a case of Titania and Bottom over again."

"He is such an honest 'Bottom.' You must not abuse him. It is wonderful how such an exquisite little fairy as Cynthia could have fancied him. She showed great discrimination in her choice; he is so thoroughly excellent and so hopelessly in love, poor fellow. It is small wonder; she is very beautiful."

"Do you think so?" said Mr. Oldham. "My taste may be very depraved, but I can see nothing to admire in that soulless prettiness which attracts the eye and fails to touch the heart. You have an opera-cloak, I see, Mrs. Fanshawe. Do you not think that a seat on the promenade would be preferable to this stifling room?"

"If you like," said Theo, rising.

They passed out, and found a comfortable place away from the glare of the lights and the hum of voices. They sat for some time silent. Slightly as she knew him, Mr. Oldham was not a man for whom it seemed necessary to make conversation.

"Mrs. Fanshawe," he said, suddenly, "do you believe in the friendships of women?"

"I hardly know," Theo answered, smiling at the abruptness of the question. "My own experience has been so very limited. Save and except Mrs. Trowbridge, I have had no woman-friend. I have an aunt of whom I am very fond, but it is more the love of a child for its mother than that of friend for friend. I have a great affection for Mrs. Trowbridge, and I feel very tenderly towards her."

All this time Oldham was looking at her with a curious expression in his dark eyes.

"I have always fancied that women are less sincere than men where those of their own sex are concerned. They are true enough to men,—a great deal more so than we deserve."

"Why do you speak so slightingly of your own sex?" Theo said, in a tone of reproval. "It seems such a pity to me to start in life doubting every one."

"How is one to help it when the wrong and treachery is forced upon one?"

"I do not think that I understand treachery," Theo said, a shadow of pain on her brow and a sudden chill around her heart; she shivered slightly as she spoke. "Let us go in," she said, rising quickly; "it is cold!"

The tired musicians played on and on; the dancers

were still jostling one another; under the influence of champagne the revolutions became more rapid, and the cheeks of the dancers slightly flushed. Theo stood watching them for some minutes.

"I am not keeping you, I hope?" she said. "Are you quite sure that were it not for me you too would be whirling in the vortex?"

"Not I!" laughed Oldham. "Like yourself, I am guileless of all terpsichorean knowledge."

Jack came up presently, and a few minutes later Alfred and Cynthia.

"Where have you been?" was the latter's greeting. "We have looked everywhere for you. Did you think that I had appropriated your husband? Impossible to dance with people of whom one knows nothing, and Captain Fanshawe is a delightful partner."

"I am so glad that you enjoyed it, dear," said Theo. "Mr. Oldham and I have been sitting outside, Alfred," she continued, turning to her husband.

Alfred gave a quick look of suspicion at the pair, which did not escape Oldham. It is one thing to enjoy a flirtation with one's wife's friend, and another to find that in the mean time she has been enjoying the conversation of another man.

"Ah!" he said, rather stiffly. "I think that we may as well be going; the room is disgustingly crowded. Trowbridge, will you give my wife your arm?" as he offered his own to Cynthia.

"If Mrs. Fanshawe will allow me," said Oldham, drawing himself up with an air of hauteur which secretly amused Theo, and not offering to release her hand from his arm when Jack stepped forward.

"Oh, certainly!" Alfred said, as he walked off.

"You do not like Mr. Oldham," his wife said to him that night.

"No, not particularly; he is a queer sort of fellow: writes books, and sneers at every one and everything."

"I did not notice anything of the misanthrope about him. What style of books does he write?"

"Never read them," yawned her husband. "Metaphysical, I believe. I know very little of him. You need not be too familiar with him."

"I hope there is no danger of my being too familiar with any one," said Theo, laughing; "it is newly come to me, if there be."

"Nonsense! you know what I mean," said her husband, crossly.

"Indeed I do not." And, in truth, she was perfectly ignorant of what was passing in his mind.

Weeks passed, one much the same as the other; still Alfred professed himself charmed with Baden, and Theo, as befits a dutiful, loving wife, was charmed because he was charmed. Mr. Oldham, regardless of Alfred's coldness, attached himself to their party. But for him Theo would have passed many lonely hours, for Alfred found numerous friends among the men who arrived in great numbers for the races; besides which, he had deemed it necessary to constitute himself Cynthia's guardian.

"You see," he had said to his wife, "she has always a crowd of fellows around her on the promenade of an evening, of whom she knows absolutely nothing. Trowbridge is such a fool that he is worse than useless, so I look after her a bit."

With this explanation Theo was fain to be content. There was something, however, in her friend's manner which caused her some slight uneasiness. "I am afraid that she is a sad coquette," she said to herself. "I wonder if Alfred has seen it, that he thinks it necessary to watch her; her head is turned by all the admiration she excites." Not even to her husband would she breathe a suspicion of her friend's flirting propensities.

Theo made the acquaintance of two American girls, who, with their father, were passing the summer at Baden. They were honest, enthusiastic young women, and so earnest in their admiration for Mrs. Fanshawe that they caused her great amusement.

"Sister and I raved about you from the first," the younger said. "Father admired Mrs. Trowbridge; so did we, of course. We thought her perfectly lovely; but you were a revelation to us so different from all the Englishwomen we had ever seen that your nationality became a disputed point. You were so well dressed; besides, you never went to church; all the Englishwomen I know go to church three times a day, and wear great black crosses, and always to the same church, too, Sunday after Sunday; it must be horribly dull. When we are at home—in Baltimore, I mean—sister and I never think of going twice to the same church. For my part, I am indifferent as to what the denomination may be; I like all the little religions."

"Toleration is evidently taught in the United States," said Theo, with a smile.

"Well, you see, with us it is different; we don't have to pay for our religion, as you all do. When people pay for a thing they like to imagine that it is better than

anything else. I guess that must be the reason. I like your church immensely. Sister and I went to all the high churches in London. They were ever so nice. I wanted to go to confession, only sister would not let me. She was afraid that I would make up some dreadful stories and shock the minister. He did look so disgustingly sanctimonious, it would have been tempting."

In this manner they would rattle on, to Theo's great amusement. With all this apparent lightness, she was surprised to find that both of the sisters had read and thought far more deeply than most Englishwomen of twice their age.

"I am learning bookkeeping, Mrs. Fanshawe," the elder said, one day, when Theo surprised her at work. "It is one of father's theories that every woman should fit herself to earn her own living in case of necessity. Father is rich now, but that is not saying that he will always be rich; and it will be very nice for me to feel prepared to face the world *en cas de besoin*. If I were to marry a poor man, for instance, I could make forty dollars a week at bookkeeping in a large store. And should I not marry, which is very possible,—I am already five-and-twenty,—I shall feel the need of some work in life. Indeed, I begin to feel that already. I am too old to be any longer devoted to balls or parties. Most of my friends have married off; they have their husbands and babies. We Americans don't cling to the skirts of our youth as Englishwomen do. I have told mamma that I shall not go out next winter, and when sister is married—she is engaged to a New Yorker—I shall simply give up all society, and teach the children at home."

"You will be quite right," said Theo. "There is no more pitiable object than a family of English girls, between twenty-five and forty, still dancing when they get the chance, still devoting their entire time and energies to the stupid round of so-called gayety, and thereby incapacitating themselves for the serious work of life."

"Dear me, Theodora, how severe you are on your own countrywomen!" said Mrs. Trowbridge. "For my part, I think it must be bad enough to work when it is an actual necessity. In the mean time, I am quite willing that Jack should support me. But you don't really mean that you would become a bookkeeper in a horrid shop, Miss Bradley?"

"Certainly I would if it were necessary; why should I not? There is nothing derogatory in work. You are a thing of beauty and a joy forever, Mrs. Trowbridge; I am little and homely; therefore, I ought to be useful. It is very well for butterflies to be idle, but ugly brown bees must work."

"I advise you to sell those large solitaire diamonds before you enter the shop," laughed Mrs. Trowbridge.

"I do not intend entering the shop unless it is necessary. But I do intend making *some* use of the very fair average intellect which I possess," answered the decided little American. She disliked Cynthia, wondering a little at Theodora's blindness, as outsiders are wont to do, while she liked her the better for it.

"Theo," said her husband, one morning, "I think of going to Heidelberg until to-morrow. My brother's wife has a young relative there who is in trouble. I am supposed to be capable of extricating the idiot. Will you mind being left alone for a short time?"

"Not in the least," answered Theo. "I would go with you, but it might make your task more difficult. It is very good-natured of you to take so much trouble."

"It is rather a bore," said Alfred, in the tone of a martyr.

Theo passed the morning alone. During the afternoon Mr. Oldham appeared.

"I am the bearer of a message from Miss Bradley. Miss Minnie has gone driving with her papa. Will Mrs. Fanshawe ride with Miss Bradley at five o'clock? If so, Miss Minnie's horse is at her service."

"I shall enjoy it immensely," said Theo. "Alfred is in Heidelberg until to-morrow."

"Ah! Not gone with Mr. Trowbridge on his excursion through the Schwatzer-Wald?"

"I did not know that he had gone."

"Yes, he and some of our energetic countrymen started this morning, and are to be away a day or two. I shall much prefer a ride with you, if you have no objection."

"We shall be delighted," answered Theo.

"I never feel so free, so powerful, so all that I should suppose that a man must feel, as I do on horseback," said Theo, as they rode through the valley.

Her face was flushed, her eyes bright, with the exhilarating effect of the air and exercise. Oldham looked at her in surprise; she seemed suddenly changed, —less of a goddess and more of a woman than he had ever seen her. The horses were fresh, the day perfect. Theo had not felt so carelessly happy for months. "What is it that makes our hearts so light when sorrow is nearest?"

"You have seen this church, I suppose?" said Oldham, as they neared a little village. "It is even more tawdry than the generality; there is a small doll literally covered with gems, which they assured me were real, though I have still my doubts."

"You surely do not imagine, Mr. Oldham," exclaimed Miss Bradley, "that I, a native-born American, have been in Baden three whole weeks without seeing every object of interest within driving distance? Perhaps Mrs. Fanshawe would like to go in?"

"Not if I can possibly avoid it," laughed Theo.

Standing in front of the village inn Theo spied a phaeton which she knew well. She was about to call Oldham's attention to it, when two persons issued from the inn and walked off arm in arm towards the church. There was no mistaking Cynthia's lithe, graceful figure and shining chestnut hair, and the man upon whose arm she was leaning, surely she could not be mistaken? Yes, it was Alfred; she even caught a glimpse of his pale face and heavy black moustache, as he turned towards his companion with that tender, deferential manner which poor Theo knew so well. With an impulse which was strange to her, she turned towards Oldham; her face was so pale, and in her gray eyes was such a thoroughly dazed expression, that instinctively he guided his horse closer to her side, and indeed for one moment a feeling of intense faintness almost overcame her. With an effort which was almost superhuman she rallied, saying, in a voice which somehow did not sound like her own,—

"Shall we trot a little? Is there no other road home to vary the monotony?"

"There are two, both perfectly lovely," answered Miss Bradley. "But you look tired, Mrs. Fanshawe; perhaps we had better turn and go home quietly."

"No, no!" answered she. "I am not in the least tired." She would have fallen from exhaustion rather than run the chance of meeting that phaeton again. It was evident that the little American had seen nothing, and Theo gave a sigh of relief. On they sped through the peaceful green country, of which Theo saw nothing. She could not sufficiently collect her thoughts to thoroughly realize her position. My poor Theo! it was her first experience of deception, and she was like a puzzled child, knowing not which way to turn. Yet, with all a woman's pride, she strove bravely to appear as usual, and succeeded; but how thankful she was when they at last drew rein before the Hôtel de Hollande, yet sorry to lose sight of her two friends. Poor Theo! she had so prided herself upon her capability of standing alone; nevertheless she now felt the ground giving way under her, and longed to take the kind little American woman by the hand and say, "Every one is failing me. You are a stranger, but you are true; help me back to my old faith; stand between me and this horrible truth which I have to face;" but when Miss Bradley begged her to return with them to their hotel she pleaded a headache, and, with downcast head and eyes that burned and throbbed, made her way to her own bedroom.

"The 'eadache, mem?—dear, dear," said her maid, "let me get you a cup of tea; not that the stuff what they calls *tea* is much good, but perhaps 't'll be better than nothink."

"No, I thank you, Julia; I shall not want anything. You need not wait," said Theo, only anxious for solitude. She sat down by the open window. Ah! how clear it all was before her now! "What a blind fool I have been!" she said to herself, bitterly, as a thousand trifles, light as air, flashed across her mind, any one of which might have shown her the true state of the case. She had been so thoroughly unsuspicious that now her eyes being opened she saw very clearly. "He may return to-night," she thought. "I will not see him, I cannot see him." Rising suddenly, she locked the door; then returning to her old place by the window, she there passed the night. She reproached herself, as she sat there in her loneliness, in that she had found it impossible to murmur one word of gratitude to Reginald Oldham. "Ah! what a strong rock of defence he would be to the woman he loved!" she said to herself, with a sigh. She little guessed that the step that she heard pacing the street below her bedroom window was his, as with sad eyes and a heart as heavy as her own he watched the faint light which told him that the woman who of all whom he had ever met seemed noblest was suffering alone and in misery. Theo was not disturbed; it was not until noon the following day that Alfred appeared.

"I found the young scamp all right," he said, not noticing his wife's pallid, weary face and stern gray eyes.

Theo held up her hands quickly as though to avert a blow. She had loved him too well not to shiver and shrink from the false words which he uttered.

"I—I saw you yesterday, you and Mrs. Trowbridge;

we were riding, and passed you unnoticed." She spoke quite simply, as she always did when strongly moved.

They stood facing each other for a moment, then Alfred attempted a ghastly smile; but Theo turned from him with a little shudder of loathing which should have been very eloquent to him, arresting the words on his lips with—

"I do not ask any explanation; were you to give me a thousand I would still be incredulous. Only understand that from this moment I am your wife in name alone."

"Great God! Theodora, you are not going to allow a foolish flirtation to come between us? That little devil led me on, and your own blindness did the rest."

"You were the victim of circumstances, of course," said his wife, gloomily. "Spare me your defence; all the words ever spoken will not mend matters, and however light a thing it may be for you to speak an untruth, it is sad enough for me to listen to it!" Then she left him.

Troubles, truly, come not singly but in battalions. The following day brought Theo a telegraphic message announcing the death of her cousin Mabel. It was from Lord Atherling, and concluded with these words: "Come to my mother, if possible." Theo placed the telegram in her husband's hands.

"I must go," she said.

"I don't see what good you can do by going. Do as you like, but I can't leave until after the races."

"There is no reason why you should accompany me."

So it was arranged that Theo should start the following morning. She wrote a few lines of farewell to

Miss Bradley, and caught sight of Reginald Oldham's face on her way to the station.

The cheek which Alfred just touched with his lips when he parted with his wife was cold and pale as marble.

"I hope that you will find them all well, Theodora. Are you sure that you have money enough? All right, good-by!" as the guard closed the door.

He walked off lighter of heart than he had been for many a day. He was inexpressibly glad to have her go, with her tragedy ways, as he was pleased to term poor Theo's cold sadness. It was a dreary journey, and taken, alas! in vain.

"Une dépêche télégraphique pour madame," said the waiter, ere poor Theo had time to take off her bonnet and shawl. Theodora's hands trembled as she tore it open, and she sank into the nearest chair, with a low cry, when she read it.

"From Atherling, Scarborough, to Mrs. Alfred Fanshawe, Hôtel du Louvre, Paris: 'Your telegram just received; it is too late. My mother died this morning.'"

That tender heart which had borne so much was broken at last. Wearied out with nursing, almost distraught with misery at the loss of the child she had so dearly loved, she had entered into her rest gladly.

Theodora, thoroughly exhausted and unnerved by grief, gave herself up to utter despair; for the first time in her life her magnificent health failed her, and she lay for long days really ill, while her little maid, Julia, afraid to disobey her mistress, although half wild with alarm, sat looking at her with meek, frightened eyes.

"Would you not send a tellygraft to master, ma'am, or to Mrs. Baskervyle?" she would say, plaintively, every now and again.

Theo was young and very strong. By the time Alfred joined her in Paris she was about again, looking much as usual, though very pale.

"Why, Theodora, you are as white as a ghost!" was his greeting.

"Am I?" she said. "I think that it is only the dress; mourning makes one look so pale."

She had awaited her husband's arrival in Paris for several reasons, the most paramount of which was, a vision of her mother's astonishment should she return to England alone. In her distracted mental and weak physical state a cross-examination from Mrs. Baskervyle was more than she could have borne.

Ethelbert had joined the embassy at Berlin; her mother, therefore, was the only one whom she had to fear.

Alfred found Paris insufferable. "For heaven's sake let us go to Dieppe," he said; "that is, unless you have a particular partiality for sunstrokes and melting asphalte."

"I will go anywhere," she answered, wearily.

To Dieppe, therefore, they went. The quaint old town suited Theo's mood; she would pass hour after hour in some quiet corner of the old cathedral, envying the market-women, who could come in and drop on their knees with perfect faith in the efficacy of their prayers. "If I could believe," she thought, "it would be something to hold to, something to love."

One day her little maid followed her to the cathedral

with a letter from England; it was from her mother, and contained very unlooked-for news. "You will be surprised to hear," the letter said, "that dear Hugh has engaged himself to Ida Lyndall. Of course, he could have done better in a worldly point of view, though his high position and great wealth certainly made it possible for him to choose as his heart dictated. Dear Ida's overwhelming grief at his mother's death, her lonely condition, and sweet, unaffected piety touched him, and no wonder! I am sincerely glad that grace has been given him to choose one whose heart is set upon a rock," etc.

"Poor Hugh!" was Theo's mental observation; "I am afraid that it is his heart which is set upon a rock."

It was November before the Fanshawes again set foot in England.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRAVE HEART.

"Cease to lament for those thou canst not help,
And study help for that for which thou hast lamented.
Time is the nurse and breeder of all good."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

THERE are times in the lives of all of us when some sudden blow has fallen which has laid our hopes low, when we stand helpless and amazed, gazing with hopeless eyes backward o'er the past, which seems so far away, like a dream which has flown taking with it all the old life, and onward to the future, which has suddenly put on another and unknown aspect which affrights us with its strangeness, so unlike is it to all our fancy had loved to paint. It becomes chaotic, and we peer through the darkness with despairing eyes, when the present is, alas! as drearily unreal as either past or future. Upon such dark days had our Theodora entered. With her love for her husband had flown all those rose-colored dreams of future bliss, that future which they were to pass together, each the companion and helpmate of the other. Poor Theodora was experiencing that utter despair which attacks youth when first assailed by the "stings and arrows of outrageous fortune;" but though she had thought over the misery of it all until "all the world was bitter as a tear," despair is short-lived "*quand on a vingt ans,*"

and by the time she had passed three or four weeks in London this overwhelming misery gave place to a weary discontent, which was less trying to body and mind, though sad enough, God knows.

She was sitting idly—she who once had allowed herself no unoccupied moment—in the little drawing-room of the house in May-Fair to which Alfred had brought his young wife, thinking what a mockery the whole thing was. It was indeed like some fearful nightmare to Theo,—the strange house, made all the more lonely by the cold, unloving companionship of her husband; the dark London street, with its uniform rows of houses, one of which she was conscious was her own, but into which it seemed impossible to instil any of her own individuality. She used to sit and look around at the inanimate objects with which the little room was perhaps overcrowded, with a strong inclination to throw them all from the window. There was something in their fragile prettiness which annoyed her. Her sombre black figure was reflected and repeated in the tall French mirrors until she seemed to herself encompassed by that dreadful furniture, without possibility of escape. When this feeling became too painful she would go to her mother's, but a few squares distant.

Mrs. Baskervyle had quitted the manor for the winter with the ostensible object of being near Theo, but in reality because she found the poor old place too frightfully dull. Something kept Theodora quiet, regarding her matrimonial difficulties, towards her mother. Had Ethelbert been near she could have gone to him and unbosomed herself; but she feared

her mother's weak repinings, which would indeed have added to her heavy burden. She had passed the morning at her mother's house in Queen Street, where Mrs. Baskervyle had established herself, and a feeling very like shame prevented her from again fleeing that dreadful room. She had returned that morning laden with flowers, as many as possible of which were old home friends, with which she had tried to lighten up her prison. It was very dreary sitting there, but still she sat on, not even a book in her hands and utterly unmindful of everything save her own loneliness, when the door was thrown open and the servant announced Mr. Oldham.

Theo received him with almost a cry of pleasure. "I am so glad to see you!" she said, as she sat looking at him to make sure that he was the same honest rock of defence to which she had mentally compared him at Baden-Baden. "You have been a long time coming."

"I am glad that you think so," he answered, with the old grave smile. "I was fearful that you might think me intrusive for calling so soon, as you are not receiving just at present." And he glanced at her black dress.

"Oh, I'm delighted to see friends, real friends, though I am glad of the excuse to deny myself to mere society acquaintances."

"What a pretty little place you have here!" he said, looking round the room with kind interest.

"I'm glad that you like it; I loathe it," Theodora said, bluntly,—then correcting herself,—"that is, you see, I'm lonely sometimes. I have never lived alone

before, and somehow I don't seem to have that intense affection for my house and general belongings which other women have, or profess to have; and I sit here sometimes and feel inclined to cry, like Sterne's starling, 'I can't get out! I can't get out!'"

"But you must get out," objected Reginald Oldham, drawing his chair nearer. "Will you forgive me, I wonder, if I tell you that you have lost a something which I saw in your face the first time that I ever had the pleasure of meeting you? Do you remember the old castle? You were standing looking out over the surrounding country; there was such an eager look in your eyes that it made me curious to know you and fathom your thoughts, else I knew your husband so slightly that it is more than possible that I would have passed with a real Englishman's bow, which is as good as a blow any day. I did not penetrate far, Mrs. Fanshawe, for you returned to the view after our introduction, and thinking your husband was still by your side, you said, 'Look at the Rhine, Alfred; 'tis like a thread of gold only in the distance, and yet it is the first thing that strikes the eyes and the most important feature in the landscape: it is like truth.'"

"It was not a very original remark," said Theo, with a sad smile.

"No, but there was that joyous look of expectation in your eyes as if you expected all life to be as clear before you as were the fields and the river and the bright sunlight. That night you turned to me with a puzzled look, and said, 'I don't think that I understand treachery.' Do you remember?"

"Yes, but I am changed now; marriage ages a woman

so much, you know, and my aunt's death was a real sorrow to me."

The unwonted tears were in her eyes as she spoke.

"Yes, I know; but what I wish to say to you is that because you have found life more difficult than you expected it to be, you must not cease to look forward with a true faith in all human nature to a brighter future for the world."

"I used to think so, and you are quite wrong if you imagine that I ever for a moment entertained any false or sentimental ideas concerning life. I only hoped to be able to do some good, and this is the end!"

With a hopeless gesture she spread out her hands towards the decorations of the room. Reginald looked at her with a smile which ended in a sigh.

"Not quite the end yet," he said, cheerfully; "in the mean time you can do something that will help me very much if you will."

"I would be glad of any work."

"I was called to the bar, as perhaps you know, some years ago, and though I never practise and have small taste for the profession, I keep my chambers still. The other day I was asked to defend a very interesting case. It is that of a poor widow who has certain claims against a wealthy firm, which claims they are inclined to disregard; she is one of that sad class of persons who have known better days. I have told her that I will ask some lady friend to call upon her. She lives in Bloomsbury. If it be not too far for you to penetrate, perhaps you would go to her. She seems miserably poor; you will see what she wants and let me know. I am not asking too much of you?"

"I should like to go," said Theo, eagerly, and Reginald was made to repeat the whole story, which was in truth sad enough.

"Ah, now I see the old look," he said, cheerfully, as he rose to depart. "When may I come again?"

"Any time and at all times."

"That is very kind; I will avail myself of the permission. If you will give me a piece of paper, I will write Mrs. Rowland's address. Thanks! I rely upon you to tell me your exact impressions of her; then we will see what can be done."

As he turned the corner of the street a brougham passed him. He caught one glimpse of Alfred Fanshawe's pale face, and his own flushed.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered. "I wonder if he is such a fool as not to know what it is that he is throwing away?"

The recognition had been mutual, although neither had acknowledged the other; and Alfred greeted his wife with—

"Has that fellow been here?"

"Mr. Oldham has this moment left, if it be him you mean," answered Theo, quietly.

"I beg that you will receive no man during my absence, especially that man!"

"And why *especially* that man?"

"Simply, he is a fellow I don't like, and whom I don't trust!"

"Might one ask what there is against him?"

"I did not say that there is anything against him; but he is one of those half-and-half sort of fellows, an author and the Lord knows what beside."

"If that be all, I should hardly be justified in refusing him the *entrée* of my house."

"He is a visionary; writes atheistical books, is altogether bad form."

"I am sorry that he should have shocked your religious feelings," said Theo, with quiet scorn. "I think that the time has now come when there should be a thorough understanding between us. You have yourself pronounced our marriage a mistake; in that opinion I most perfectly coincide. You have, I believe, returned to your former life since our return to London. So be it, but you have not deigned to bestow one thought upon my wishes or pleasure. Our lives are divided forever. It only remains for me to form such ties as are yet possible for me. In the ordering of my life I shall consider you in no manner, shape, or form. I have the misfortune to bear your name; this much, therefore, I owe you,—to keep that name unsullied, and this much I promise. Do you understand?"

"I don't know what you mean when you say I have not consulted your wishes. I got this d——d house and furnished it for you. What more do you want?"

"Am I asking for more? I but wish you to recognize that I shall resent all interference!"

"Go your own way," growled Alfred, sullenly; "only don't jeopardize my honor."

"I think that it is in small danger from *me*," said Theo, as she left the room, with ever so slight an emphasis on the pronoun.

Alfred sat for some time pondering, and the result was that he was obliged to confess that he had aroused a spirit which he was impotent to extirpate.

Theodora paid more than one visit to the poor widow in Bloomsbury, and through her found much to occupy her entire time. She was able to help so many, who, too proud to seek help, were very thankful when aid was offered, as Theo offered it, frankly, yet with the delicate tact of good breeding and a kind heart. There was something in her strength and honesty which inspired the most fearful with confidence. Reginald Oldham was delighted to hear of her thus occupied, and more than thankful to have been the means of opening out to her such a sphere of usefulness. He would drop into the little house in May-Fair once or twice a month, late in the afternoon, when he was sure to find Theo at home. She was careful in always mentioning these visits to her mother or some third person in her husband's presence. "He shall not suppose that I descend to anything clandestine, or that I am afraid of him," she said to herself, proudly.

Thus the winter passed away. With a revival of the gayety Mrs. Baskervyle's spirits rose. She had noticed the coldness between Theodora and her husband, but save for an innuendo or two Theo had been spared the cross-examination which she had so dreaded.

"It is useless for me to expect Theodora's confidence," she said to herself; "she was always so uncommunicative."

Upon the whole, Mrs. Baskervyle found it conducive to her own comfort to ignore her daughter's sorrow, and by dint of declaiming upon the subject of Theo's domestic felicity almost persuaded herself that the May-Fair house was the abode of bliss which she described. Invitations were pouring in, and with the aid of tears

and entreaties she induced her daughter to accept a few. It was noticed that Captain Fanshawe seldom accompanied his young wife; but when a man has passed his thirty-fifth year it is natural that society should have lost much of its charm. Mrs. Baskervyle's presence made the fact less noticeable. Oh, those dreary balls! How wearily Theo would mount the stairs after one of them; how hard she would beg for a respite; but Mrs. Baskervyle was inexorable.

"If you shut yourself up, my dear, people will say that you are unhappy."

It must be confessed that Mrs. Baskervyle showed some knowledge of her daughter's character when she put forth that plea. Now and again she would meet Mr. Oldham, and then the evening would seem less interminable. Once or twice she had a few moments' conversation with Lady Atherling, who, however, was unaccompanied by her husband, whose recent bereavement precluded him from all such festivities. Her ladyship enjoyed the reputation for great sanctity, and her name figured conspicuously upon all the charity lists in the country. Ida was certainly very much changed. Theo could hardly believe her to be the Ida Lyndall of old. She had called but once, and on that occasion sat patronizing Mrs. Fanshawe with an *aplomb* which was curious to witness. Lord Atherling had seemed to avoid Theo, and when Mrs. Baskervyle had inquired the reason of his conduct he had spoken very plainly.

"I avoid the house fearing to meet its master, whose hand I would rather not touch. I do not know, aunt, if *you* are aware of the life he is leading, but I had only

to look into my cousin's face to see that she is very miserable. I hope that she knows that all my help will be hers should she ever need it."

Mrs. Baskervyle could only weep hopelessly. "Dear Hugh," she said, between her sobs, "you exaggerate the thing in your own mind; I am sure that you do. There is some trouble between them, I know, but nothing serious. I dare say that Alfred is no worse than other men."

"I should be very sorry to think so," said Hugh, gloomily.

"Pray, pray, do not mention it to Theodora, she is so hard. You have no idea how hard she can be, Hugh."

"I shall not interfere, of course; but in case of necessity, I wish Theo to know that I shall be ready to take her brother's place. Of course I cannot interfere, but you *certainly* should. I am not given to the talking or hearing of scandal, as you know, but it is impossible to ignore his conduct. Let me know what you decide to do; I'll help you if I can."

Mrs. Baskervyle could only wring her hands and weep, whereupon her nephew left her, and the distracted woman made up her mind to trust in Providence.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THEY PARTED.

"We twain shall not remeasure
The ways that left us twain."
A. C. SWINBURNE.

THE season was drawing to a close; people were beginning to make plans for the summer, and Theodora was thankful, so wearied out was she with the round of what it had been satire to call gayety, her heart was so heavy in the midst of it all. Reginald Oldham was sitting at the open window, talking as he only knew how to talk of all things which were most hopeful in her o'ershadowed life.

"I shall leave for Scotland the day after to-morrow," he was saying. "If you are not too occupied, a few lines from time to time would be such a pleasure to me. It is not asking too much?"

Theo was assuring him that the pleasure would be mutual, when the door opened and her husband entered. One look at his face was sufficient for Theo, and when, disregarding Oldham's outstretched hand, he quitted the room without a word she was relieved, although her face was pale with anger at the insult offered. Some impulse urged her to make Reginald her confidant, but pride prevented, and the *contretemps* was allowed to pass unnoticed by either.

"I shall be at the opera to-night," she said, when he rose to depart. "Nillson is singing in Faust, and I make a point of never missing that opera of operas. Will you join us?"

"I shall be in the stalls, but you must forgive me if I am a little late."

About ten minutes after Reginald's departure the house-door closed with a bang, and Theodora saw her husband walking quickly down the street.

Her Majesty's was crowded from pit to dome; tier upon tier of gayly-dressed women sat hushed by the prima donna's voice, which soared high and clear.

Theodora and her mother were in their box on the second tier. Theodora was still dressed in half-mourning, and her heavy black dress well became her grand style of beauty; it was small wonder that one man gave place to another in rapid succession in the back of the box. The second act was over, and Theodora, her back turned to the house, was chatting with a good-natured youth, whose fresh, boyish laugh always did her heart good, when something in his ingenuous face made her follow the direction of his eyes. Two persons were entering the box opposite, which, up to that moment, had been vacant. Theo just caught one glimpse of a man's shoulders as he seated himself. The woman who accompanied him stood for one moment in the front of the box, and glanced around the house.

Theodora knew her for one of the queens of the *demi monde*, a beautiful, abandoned creature, with an inordinate love of fine clothes, glittering jewelry, and the good things of this life generally, for which she sold her person with small compunction,—a soulless,

heartless, brainless animal. She stood gazing round the house until her eye lighted upon Theodora; then she turned and spoke some word to her companion. Up to that moment he had been hidden by the heavy curtains, but now he came forward and placed himself by the woman's side. As he did so Theodora recognized her husband.

Every drop of blood seemed to recede from her face and rush to her heart, leaving her deadly pale. She heard the young man murmur some words of adieu; she heard the box-door open and shut; still she sat looking at the flowers she held in her hand, unable to move or think.

"Theodora! Theodora! you must be getting deaf, my dear child," said her mother; "here is Mr. Oldham."

Theo turned and met a pair of sad, stern eyes. Reginald was as pale as herself; he, too, had seen the occupants of the opposite box, and an irrepressible impulse had drawn him to Theo's side.

The curtain now rose, and Theo appeared entirely engrossed by the imaginary woes of Miss Nilsson, though she was painfully conscious that many glasses were stealthily directed towards her; for Alfred Fanshawe's pale face was well known, as was the infamy of the woman by his side.

"Courage," whispered Oldham. "If you can stay through this one act and part of the next, I can manage to cover your retreat."

"I will bear it," she answered; and she did bear it, and bore it bravely, though she felt rather than saw pitying eyes fixed upon her from all parts of the house.

No one came near her, and Mr. Oldham talked on, he knew not what, anything to make conversation.

Gretchen was writhing in agony before the altar. Theo watched her, and was conscious of the beauty of her acting and the charm of her voice; still she could not collect her thoughts, and was capable of receiving impressions only. Although her eyes never once strayed from the stage, she was miserably, wretchedly conscious of that white face opposite, and of the painted face of the woman by his side, even the dress which she wore,—a curious pale yellow,—and the aigrette of sparkling gems which sparkled above her curls.

There was one woman in the stalls who watched this tragedy with gleaming eyes. Cynthia Trowbridge had returned to London, though, strange to say, she had not sought out her dear friend Theodora. Nothing of all that had passed had escaped her, and she now sat, secretly amused, awaiting the *dénouement.* When at last Theodora rose and left her box Mrs. Trowbridge touched her husband's arm.

"If we are to put in an appearance at Mrs. Powers's, it is quite time that we went." And, folding her opera-cloak round her, she made her way out. Theodora was standing, her hand in Oldham's; he was saying,—

"I shall not leave for Scotland till I hear from you. If I can help you, you will not deny me the happiness of doing so?"

"You are kind," she answered, "but no one can help me. When I am able to think of it all, I will write to you and thank you."

Outside they were calling for Mrs. Baskervyle's carriage.

"Theodora," said her mother, "there is Cynthia. Ah! she has seen us."

"Mamma, I—I can't see her. Mr. Oldham, can't we go out and find the carriage?" And she pressed forward.

"Theodora, are you mad? Dear Cynthia, so delighted to see you back again!"

There was nothing for it, and, turning, Theodora bowed. For one moment their eyes met; Theo's were cold and stern, Cynthia's full of malicious triumph.

"How she hates me!" Theo thought, with wonder. "God knows I have more reason to hate her." She did not know how hard it is for some people to forgive the superiority which they resent, yet are obliged to acknowledge.

"Your carriage, Mrs. Baskervyle," said Oldham, offering his arm to that lady and leading her off in triumph, followed by Theo.

"Tell the coachman to drive to mamma's," Theo said, as she bent from the window. "I am so thankful for your kindness!" And she sank back in the corner of the carriage with almost a groan of relief.

"I must say, Theodora, that you were very rude to the Trowbridges; you hardly returned Cynthia's bow, and never so much as offered your hand."

"Mamma, don't; I am half out of my mind!" said Theo. "You did not see it, you are so near-sighted; but Alfred was in the box opposite to us, and that woman who calls herself Madge Bracegirdle was with him. I must go home with you, please, if you will let me!" With which plain statement of facts, Theo again sank back into her corner.

"Great heavens! Theodora, why did you not tell me? My dear child, what shall we do? Are you sure that you are not mistaken? You must have been mistaken; he would not dare——"

"No, mamma, it was he; everybody in the house saw it, with the exception of yourself. They made themselves conspicuous enough, heaven knows! Let us say nothing more about it,—doubtless he did it with the intention of driving me to extremities. He has succeeded in doing so. To-morrow we will talk it over, and see what is to be done."

"Theodora, I think, I really do think, that you had better go home. You must not take such a dreadful, such a suicidal step as that of leaving your husband's house without much consideration. Think of it, Theodora; please do for my sake, for all our sakes!"

"You can shut your doors against me, mother, of course, if you choose; you will simply force me to go to a hotel."

"You are very cruel, Theodora, to speak in that manner! Who talks of closing their doors against you? Dear, dear, to think of his doing such a thing, and in the face of all London! It is social death to him, especially if you leave him, Theodora,—and to you, too, for that matter! What is a woman separated from her husband? Ah, Theo, think of it!"

"I will, mamma, only in the mean time let me stay with you. I promise to take no decided step until we have talked it over."

"If the whole thing could be hushed up, Theodora, believe me, you would be a thousand times happier. If you could only persuade yourself to overlook it!"

"Mamma, for once cannot you forget the world and think of me? It is true that I know but little of society, but what I do know has certainly not convinced me that within its limits only people are blessed. Pray put aside all such thoughts and try to help me. God knows I need help!"

They arrived a few minutes later, and Mrs. Baskervyle fidgeted about until a bedroom had been prepared for Theo, with a bright fire burning in the grate. In truth, she was very sorry for her daughter, and could Theo have sobbed out her misery, as some women would have done, Mrs. Baskervyle would have had many tears and much sympathy at her disposal; but it was impossible to look at the matter from a sentimental point of view when Theodora stood before her, with those hard lines around her mouth, in uncomplaining, dry-eyed misery.

"Let me stay and see you into bed, my dear," she said, with unwonted tenderness; but Theo only kissed her and begged to be left alone, saying, "Don't trouble about me, mamma. I am tired, I shall sleep." Once alone, she threw off her dress, unclasping the jewels from her neck and arms with a bitter laugh; they had been wedding-presents. She opened the window, and flung the flowers which she had carried far into the street.

"I wish I could throw you after them!" she said, looking down at the glistening diamonds. Then she sat down before the fire and thought till her brain throbbed, and until those gray eyes of hers grew harder, colder, than ever. "Forgive him! Never, never!" Ah! why had he come into her life, only so utterly to destroy it?

And why, above all, having wrecked her peace of mind, had he by such a cruel insult endeavored to crush her pride? "What have I done to him?" she said to herself. "What have I done to him, that he should dare to take such a revenge?" Then she thought of the woman who had been with him, how her name would pass from mouth to mouth among such as she. Rising, she walked the floor in an agony of rage and misery. She thought of the triumph in Cynthia Trowbridge's brown eyes. "Ah! that is what one should be to be successful in this world. Mamma was right; Cynthia has very sensible ideas. She did not exalt that unfortunate man whom she married, or weary him with too much devotion; she never loved him as I loved my husband. Did I love him?" she asked herself, in a tone full of horror. "Is it possible that I ever *loved* one so mean, so low, so despicable? No, it was a creature of my own brain whom I loved; it has been a bad, unwholesome dream. I am awake at last." As she spoke, the firelight shone on the third finger of her left hand. Quick as thought she drew off her wedding-ring and held it over the brightly-leaping flames. "No, I will return it to him."

She sat there hour after hour, until she feared that her mother might come to her. Then she lay listening to the roll of the vehicles, which already began to throng the streets, and the busy hum of awakening life throughout the great city. Mrs. Baskervyle came in on tiptoe about nine o'clock.

"My dear," she said, seeing Theo's tired eyes, from which, however, all sleep seemed to have flown, "I am afraid that you have not rested."

"No, mamma, not very much. Sit down, please; I have something to say to you."

Mrs. Baskervyle complied.

"Mamma, perhaps I should have told you before, but I thought that it was useless to fret you. Alfred and I have ceased to be husband and wife, save in name, for many months past,—ever since we were in Baden-Baden. Something occurred there, which I found it impossible to forgive, between himself and Cynthia Trowbridge. I think that I ceased to love him from that time. Now the——"

"That deceitful little thing!" interrupted Mrs. Baskervyle. "Theodora, I always told you so. I never liked that girl."

"Yes, mamma, I know. Well, that was the beginning of it, and since then we have been nothing to each other, worse than nothing, and last night was the end. I know now that it could not have lasted. We were so far apart that nothing could have made us even tolerate each other. Believe me, mamma, it is better as it is. I will write to Mr. Middleton, and he can arrange matters with Captain Fanshawe's lawyer."

"Great heavens! Theodora, you are not going to allow yourself to be dragged through the divorce court?"

Theodora could not restrain a smile as she answered, "No, mamma, don't be alarmed; but some arrangement must be made whereby I shall receive my income. I cannot be a burden upon you or dear old Bertie."

"Oh, dear, dear! what shall I do?" sobbed Mrs. Baskervyle. "Theodora, it does seems so sad, so dreadful. After everything, to have it come to this,—lawyers

and scandal and everything! Do, do, my dear child, think better of it. He is sorry for what has occurred by this time, you may be sure, and indeed I think that he must have been intoxicated. Probably that abandoned wretch who was with him lured him on."

"To give him his due, mamma, strong drink is not one of his weaknesses. You must look at it in its proper light, dear mamma. I should degrade myself more by returning to him now than though the whole world rang with the story of the insult which has been offered me!"

"May I send for Hugh?" pleaded Mrs. Baskervyle, as a last resort. "Will you abide by his decision?"

"I will abide by no man's decision. This is entirely a personal matter, although I think that Hugh will agree with me. Send for him if you wish, but not on my account."

"Shall I also send for your maid?—you have not a dress to wear."

"Yes—no—stay. I will write a line to her, and Pinnitt can go round in a cab and bring the things back with her."

Pinnitt was despatched to May-Fair therefore. A message was also sent to Lord Atherling, desiring his immediate presence.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. BASKERVYLE DOES HER DUTY.

"Miserable comforters are ye all."

THEODORA was seized with a perfect horror of all things pertaining to her wretched existence of the past year. When Hugh, therefore, with great kindness, urged her to make her home with them for some time, she refused even to consider the matter.

"Ida would not be pleased," she said; "and even were her willingness undoubted, I would still refuse. Husband and wife are better alone, for the first few years of their married life at least; it is a dangerous experiment, taking people as permanent inmates into your home. I would like to go away somewhere for a short time. Mamma suggests the manor, but that would be worse than anything. I could not bear the sympathy of the county."

"Will you leave the matter in my hands?" asked Hugh, "and in the mean time remain with your mother?"

"Yes, if you will promise to give up all idea of a reconciliation; that can never be. Mamma is, of course, anxious to bring it about, but she has sworn to me that I shall be in no way annoyed while in her house; therefore I am quite willing to remain here. Ah me! I wish she could understand me better."

"My dear," said Hugh, gravely, "we have all something to bear. Marriage, above all, is a terrible test; it is seldom satisfactory to both parties. Had your husband behaved with even common decency, I should have advised you to have remained under his protection; he has made it impossible for me to do so. I spoke to your mother some time since as to the life which I knew him to be leading, and expressed my readiness to help you."

"She never told me," groaned Theo; "not that it would have done much good if she had. I was willing to bear, though I knew it or surmised it all, but open insult I cannot bear. Thank you for your kindness, dear Hugh; you will add to it if you will consent to an interview with Captain Fanshawe's lawyer. I cannot trust mamma."

Lord Atherling readily promised his co-operation. Theo fell back to something like the old life prior to her marriage, writing and studying all the morning, and persistently refusing the invitations which were forwarded from May-Fair.

A letter from Hugh informed her that Captain Fanshawe had refused to agree to any terms unless a personal interview with his wife were granted him, which Theodora indignantly refused.

"I do not wish to meet him," Hugh wrote, "but if I can assist you by so doing, I am at your service." Theo could only thank him and await the *dénouement* with what patience she might.

Society, in the mean time, was much occupied with her private affairs. Theo had never been a favorite: her beauty was a fault which her own sex found it hard

to forgive; and where it attracted many of the opposite sex, her indifference, which she was incapable of disguising, turned would-be admirers into open or secret foes, while her intellect, ever dominant, was an offence to men and women alike; her wide sympathies, her scorn of mere conventionalities, her decided opinions, often very decidedly expressed, shocked and surprised English people, who, though they make great boast of their national freedom, are socially the most intolerant people in the civilized world. Were they separated? was the question asked, or was it merely a misunderstanding? The story of Alfred's appearance at the opera was told at many a five o'clock tea-table, and such is the slavish bowing-down to society in our free and enlightened country, that the opinion generally expressed was that Mrs. Fanshawe would very wisely overlook her husband's really inexcusable conduct, and return to his protection; even Mrs. Baskervyle entertained some lingering hope that such might be the case. Lord Atherling alone understood his cousin sufficiently to know that all such hopes were vain. For the first time he exercised his marital authority, and insisted that Ida should appear to uphold his cousin.

"You may think what you like," he said, angrily, one day, in answer to her objections, "but I request that outwardly, before the world, you pay Theodora Fanshawe every honor; you will call there this afternoon."

Ida knew her husband well enough to be perfectly aware that resistance was useless. The call was therefore made, and Lady Atherling was obliged to content herself with damning her cousin with faint praise. Mrs.

Baskervyle was much pleased when returning from a round of calls, which nothing would have induced her to neglect, she found Lady Atherling's card.

"I see that Ida has been here," she said. "I hope, Theo, that you saw her."

"Unfortunately, for Hugh's sake, I did. She has 'condoled' me out of all sense of misery save that which she herself inflicted. She was kind enough to inquire into my spiritual state. I explained that I was something of a Buddhist, which surprised her into silence. I labor under the impression that she now thinks me a brand already too blackened to be snatched from the burning, and sincerely trust that she will consider her duty done. Her Pharisaism is too sickening. Even for Hugh's sake, I refuse to endure the purgatory of her presence. If she call again—which I think is not likely—I am out."

"I never could understand your dislike for poor Ida," objected Mrs. Baskervyle. "I am sure she makes Hugh a good wife."

"Oh, excellent!" exclaimed Theo, scornfully. "He looks so blissful, does he not? So like unto a bridegroom awaiting his bride! Poor old Hugh! It is in the family, I suppose, but I am afraid that he is only a little less unfortunate than I."

"I think that you need not be so unfortunate, dear," said Mrs. Baskervyle, gently, "if you could only forgive and forget."

"But you see I cannot, mamma."

"Yes you can, my dear. Alfred is very, very sorry for what occurred, and quite willing to make any reparation in his power."

"There is no reparation in his power," said Theo, sternly.

"It is incomprehensible to me, Theo, how you can be so utterly indifferent towards one you affected to love so much; your own husband, too."

"'When faith is lost, when honor dies, the man is dead,'" quoted Theo, with a sigh.

"But he is not dead, Theodora, nor likely to die; therefore it is very ridiculous of you to expect to act as though he were. I have just been with the dear duchess, and she expressed so much sorrow I was quite touched. She spoke really most kindly. 'Tell Mrs. Fanshawe,' she said, 'that I shall hope to hear that she has returned to her husband. I shall expect to see them *both* at my reception on Thursday week.' I call that very kind, my dear; and coming from a person in that position it should have great weight."

"And I call it the height of impertinence," said her daughter, her voice trembling with suppressed passion. "I always thought her grace the most vulgar old woman of my acquaintance. I am now fully convinced of the fact. I think, mamma, I do think that you might have spared me the humiliation of such a message. If you are my friend, you will cease to discuss my affairs with any one."

"I shall do as I think proper, Theodora; and if I can be the means of bringing together again those whom God has joined, I shall be most thankful."

"I advise you not to try the experiment," said her daughter, in a threatening tone, as she left the room.

But Mrs. Baskervyle was not to be intimidated, and with the assistance of her friend the duchess, and old

Lady Hightower, a deeply-laid scheme was soon on foot, whereby an interview between husband and wife was to be brought about. Alfred was to come to the house in Queen Street, there to be ushered into his wife's presence with no preliminary word of warning to poor Theo.

"It is useless asking her permission," said Mrs. Baskervyle, "and Alfred must make good his own cause."

As they had planned so was it; the result was such as might have been expected. The words which Theo spoke were few and bitter, but very decisive; then finding that he would not leave the room, Theo took the initiative and left him to ponder her words. Wild with rage at the failure of a plan of which he now acknowledged the inefficaciousness, he was leaving the house, when the dining-room door was opened cautiously, and his mother-in-law appeared on the threshold. "Dear Alfred, what does she say?"

Alfred repeated his wife's words, at the same time reproaching his mother-in-law for her share in the matter.

From Adam down, there has been no man who has not found some woman upon whom to lay the burden of his own sin or folly as the case may be.

When he left her Mrs. Baskervyle was very miserable; she was now sharing the fate of most mediators, and found herself between two fires. That her scheme should fail, she had not allowed herself to fear; to face Theo alone and unsupported after her act of treachery was dreadful to her. An hour passed; still she did not move from the dining-room window where she had taken refuge. Presently the door opened, and Theo in bonnet and shawl entered.

"Good-by, mother," she said, simply. "You will find me at the Grosvenor if you wish to see me."

"Theodora, are you mad?" stammered Mrs. Baskervyle.

"No, but I fear that you are," answered her daughter. "I told you what my course would be if you took any step towards reuniting me with that man; you gave me your oath that you would not attempt it. You have failed me once. I never give people a chance to do that a second time."

"Theodora, I swear to you——"

"You have sworn before," interrupted Mrs. Fanshawe.

"Really, Theodora, I believe I have the right to receive whom I choose in my own house."

"Precisely," said Theodora; "and your company does not please me, therefore I leave. There is no occasion for tears, please, or anger. I dare say that you meant it all kindly, but a woman of my age is, or ought to be, able to manage her own affairs."

"Very well, Theodora; I wash my hands of you. Go your own way. Wreck your own life if you see fit to do so. I have, at least, done my duty."

"That must be a great source of comfort to you," said Theo, dryly.

Without another word they parted.

Lord Atherling was surprised the next morning by the following letter from Theo:

"Grosvenor Hotel, June 14th.

"Dear Hugh,—I think that I explained to you that I should remain with mamma only so long as I

found myself unmolested. She yesterday forced upon me an interview with Captain Fanshawe. You can readily imagine how distasteful it was to me. She has rendered it quite impossible for me to remain longer with her. Would you add one more to the many kindnesses for which I already owe you so much gratitude, and find for me some house, however humble, where I can make a home for myself?

"I gave Captain Fanshawe so thoroughly to understand that there could be no reconciliation between us, that he may be now more inclined to listen to reason apropos of my income, which will enable me to live comfortably at least. You spoke of a house near Tetherby. Should the rent prove at all in accordance with my purse, I fancy it might do; being on the seashore would greatly recommend it to my mind. I am writing to Ethelbert, on whose co-operation I think I may rely. If you can find time, I will be glad to see you.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"THEODORA FANSHAWE."

This letter brought Lord Atherling in person,—not, however, before he had sought and obtained an interview with Captain Fanshawe's lawyers, which resulted in a promise on the part of their client that Theo should remain unmolested, and that her three hundred a year should be effectually secured to her.

"I think of running down to Tetherby," Lord Atherling said, "and should the house prove desirable I will make arrangements whereby you can take immediate possession."

"Ah, Hugh, you are very good. I cannot bear to be so troublesome," Theo said, touched to the heart.

"Nonsense, my dear. You see if I keep my title well out of sight I may be able to make a better bargain than would you."

The result was a short note a few days later, in which Lord Atherling said,—

"Fern Bank can be yours at the moderate rent of one hundred and twenty pounds per annum. The house stands on the cliff, a private path leading to the shore. The furniture is dingy and moth-eaten; the carpets to match; the grounds are utterly neglected, but at very small cost you can make the place habitable, even picturesque. There is none of that hopeless ugliness about it which is characteristic of modern houses. I enclose the address of the Tetherby agent, and advise you to close with him."

Theo accordingly acted upon this advice, and in rather more than a week bade farewell to London.

CHAPTER XII.

AT PEACE.

"At peace,—yes, the peace of the ocean
When passed is the storm where we foundered,
And eager and breathless the morning
Looks over the waste."

THEODORA had demurred when she was first informed of the sum which she would be obliged to pay for Fern Bank. She decided, however, that she might venture to give it a trial.

"I am not likely to run into debt; extravagance is not my pet vice. I cannot understand the pleasure of spending money simply for the sake of spending," she said to her cousin.

Lord Atherling, after much hesitation and with many blushes, said, "You will need money now for immediate use; if you will allow me to make you an allowance, Theo, I will feel, then, that in truth you regard me as a brother. Should Ethelbert marry, I would consider it my duty to make his income up to three thousand, and why should you refuse me the pleasure of acting the elder brother to your father's favorite child?"

"Dear Hugh," she answered, "I will accept you as a brother with acclamation. As to the allowance, I have no need of it. I am not used to spending money, never having had any to spend, I suppose."

"Ah, that is just it," sighed Hugh; "therefore you cannot possibly know its value. Your three hundred pounds will slip through your fingers before you are aware of its existence."

"Don't you believe it," laughed Theo. "I shall cultivate avarice; and, Hugh, I will tell you a secret: I have become quite a literary character."

"Oh, Theo, I hope not!" exclaimed Hugh, who had all a man's horror of a learned woman.

"But I have, though, and my novel bids fair towards completion. I am not ambitious, but hope to find a publisher who will give me something for it. I have tried to portray life as it is, putting far from my mind what I have found it," she added, lowering her voice.

"Poor Theo!" murmured her cousin; "you must not suppose that you alone suffer. I know that it seems hard, very hard. Remember how bright and unclouded was your youth; compare yourself to me in that respect. Since my father's death there has been no human being upon earth to whom my existence has been absolutely necessary,—in whose heart I have had the first place."

"Ah, Hugh, don't say that! Remember your mother, how fond and proud she was of you."

"She never expressed it," he said, with a sigh. "She loved me, I know; she was too tender a woman not to love her own child; but my father came between us, and Mabel monopolized her in after-years."

"Hugh, Hugh, you are mistaken! Wait, I have something to show you." She opened her desk as she spoke, and taking from it a bundle of letters, selected one,

which she placed in his hand. "You will see, dear Hugh, by that how faithfully she loved you."

With eager eyes she watched his face while he read. As she watched she suddenly saw him turn deadly pale, while the hand that held his dead mother's letter trembled like an aspen-leaf. Quick as a flash the remembrance of those other words which the letter contained, relating to Ida, came across her,—words which no man would wish to read concerning his wife. With one bound she was by his side.

"Give it me, give it me, Hugh!" she cried. "There is something in it that I had forgotten,—something that *she* would not have wished you to see." But he pushed her from him gently.

"I have seen it already. Theo, tell me, when was this letter received?"

"Some time about my marriage,—about Christmas-time, I believe. I am dreadfully, dreadfully sorry, Hugh, it has hurt you!"

"Don't mind me, dear," he said, in a hoarse voice. And seating himself on the sofa, he buried his face in his hands.

Theo sat penitent, and furious with herself for her carelessness.

"Do not take it so to heart, Hugh," she said, at last, piteously. "We are all so liable to be mistaken. Your mother was partly prejudiced against Ida by me. I hated her in the old days, you remember, and used to express my opinions very freely, regardless of justice or injustice."

"Have you had occasion to change your views?" he asked, quietly.

"I do not wish to tell you an untruth, Hugh. Ida and I are too utterly dissimilar for mutual affection. I have heard on every side the most flattering expressions of regard from one and all; therefore my foolish prejudice cannot affect her, or indeed any one."

"You acknowledge that you hate her still?"

"Indeed no! and as your wife I am quite prepared to respect her, although, as I said before, we shall never agree."

"You are quite right, my dear," her cousin said, presently, taking both her hands in his own. You *would* never agree; you *are* utterly, utterly dissimilar. Forgive you, dear child? I have nothing to forgive. I think, Theo, that you are so true yourself that you bring hidden things to light unconsciously. This is good-by," he continued, pressing his lips lightly to her forehead. "I shall not be able to call to-morrow."

He left her, and Theo sat wondering over his evident emotion as she murmured, "Is it possible that any one can love *her* to such an extent?" She received a letter from Lord Atherling the following day, enclosing a check for a hundred pounds, which he assured her would be required for immediate use. She was obliged to accept it, stipulating that she should be allowed to view it in the light of a loan.

Theo arrived at Tetherby late one afternoon. A fly had been sent to the station to meet her. A short drive of rather more than a mile through sweet-scented English hedgerows, wonders of beauty with their bunches of wild-roses and honeysuckle, brought her to the gates of Fern Bank. The house was built of gray stone, and half covered with myrtle and wisteria. A

smooth lawn spread out before the drawing-room windows. At the back of the house was a small garden, surrounded by a high hedge of box, cut and trimmed into curious, fantastic shapes. Some skilful hand had been at work there. The grass was newly cut, the flower-beds newly raked and bright with gay, freshly-planted flowers.

"Who has done this, Julia?" asked Theo of her little maid, who had preceded her by two days, and was now showing her over the house and grounds with intense satisfaction.

"Please, mem, it was Mr. Geddes, his lordship's 'ead gardener. He left to-day, and said I was to give his duty to the mistress, and say as 'ow 'e 'oped what 'ad ben done would please."

On the threshold of the drawing-room Theo stopped and stood looking around, the picture of despair. It was a large room, sparsely furnished. The furniture—what there was of it—consisted of those spider-legged chairs and tables which must have been perfect instruments of torture to our grandfathers and grandmothers. Two or three prints, yellow with age, adorned the wall. "Coronation of his Most Gracious Majesty King William III.," read Theo. "Umph! incipient madness in every line of his gracious majesty's face." And she passed on to the next, a cheerful picture, supposed to represent the Day of Judgment, the damned being decidedly in the majority. "What a nightmare!" exclaimed Theo. The third picture was perhaps a little yellower than the preceding two. With some difficulty she made it out to be Anne Boleyn on her way to execution. Theo pronounced her sympathies to be de-

cidedly with Henry. The *chef-d'œuvre* of this charming collection was a worsted-work screen, which represented an impossible young woman, attired in light blue, seated on an equally impossible horse, conspicuous for flowing mane and tail. It was not an inviting prospect, truly. For comfort Theo turned her eyes towards the window, where, beyond the dark pines which completely surrounded the house, the glorious sea gleamed golden with the rays of a setting sun. By dint of a great many flowers, a few handsome ornaments, and dozens of yards of chintz, Theo succeeded in making the drawing-room and her bedroom habitable, even pretty. Hugh, who paid her a flying visit, could hardly recognize the gloomy old rooms.

"You have done wonders," he said.

"You don't realize how much is due to a certain Mr. Geddes and the King's Gift flowers. It was very dear of you, Hugh."

"It was little enough, Theo; but you are so abominably proud I am afraid to do all that I feel I ought."

"I do not recognize the obligation," she answered, "therefore, I am sure that you need not."

For the first time in their lives there was a thorough understanding and much affection between the two. Of his wife Hugh never spoke, and when once Theo broached the subject, his face grew so dark that she was glad to allow it to drop.

This one visit was to be the last for some time, as Lord and Lady Atherling were to pass the summer abroad, and Theo had settled down to the quiet routine of her daily life, and neither sought nor desired change of any kind.

When the bustle attendant on her establishment at Fern Bank was over Theo bethought herself of Reginald Oldham, and despatched a letter to him in which she described her new home, and concluded with a hope that he would come and judge of it for himself. Reginald needed no second invitation; he had abandoned his Scotch trip, and suddenly discovered that Tetherby was not only the most salubrious, but the most attractive seaside village of the United Kingdom. He was soon settled at the village inn, lately promoted to the dignity of Imperial Hotel, Tetherby. His advent was food for scandal among the "old women" of both sexes. The rector and curate were especially exercised on the subject.

"My dear, Maria and Jane met the gentleman who is staying at the hotel walking with *that* Mrs. Fanshawe of Fern Bank!" said the wife of the latter, bursting into his study.

"No! Well, my dear, you were perhaps right in not calling."

"It only shows how careful one should be."

A whisper had gone round the village that Mrs. Fanshawe was separated from her husband. Theo acknowledged to Oldham, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, that Julia, acting on a hint from herself, had spread the report.

"I thought that, coupled with the fact that I had no money to give to their charities, and would not give it if I had it, might convince them of the undesirability of making my acquaintance," she said, with a laugh.

Any native-born Briton can well imagine what would be the fate of a handsome woman who never

went to church, and was known to be separated from her husband, in a small English village. Theo, to her own secret satisfaction, was tabooed, and passed her days busily, peacefully, and happily. Among her London acquaintances she was the subject of much censure. The story of the attempted reconciliation had naturally been told with great effect by the duchess and Lady Hightower. They had sworn everlasting secrecy, but, though it is disgraceful to be separated from one's husband, breaking one's word has ever been considered a venial offence.

Perhaps in no time of her life had Theodora been so beautiful. A look of quiet composure had replaced the anxious expression which for months she had habitually worn; her clear, ringing voice and honest eyes seemed to speak defiance,—not so much the defiance of an injured woman as that of a noble soul giving back scorn for scorn. Self-reliant, firm, unconquerable, what wonder that men who liked to feel their own strength superior, and women who dealt in weak upbraidings and who fawned at the feet of their god Society, mutually disliked and distrusted this free soul, who was as out of place in their narrow world as they would have been on Olympus when the gods of the old world still inhabited that favored spot? Even the charitable pronounced her most peculiar. It was but natural. As well expect the mole to exult in the eagle's flight, as look for appreciation of the highest from the lowest.

Theo used to look at her own beauty in those days with a cold admiration and a certain disdain, thinking with bitterness of what it had brought her. Of a nature reserved almost to a fault, she was denied the com-

fort which confidences seem to afford many women. To Oldham, indeed, she had tried to speak. He had listened in silence for a few moments, and then begged her not to continue, saying, "I want you to be able to say, with poor Marie Antoinette, 'I have seen everything, I have known everything, I have forgotten everything!' When this is possible to you, I shall be able to think of the subject, and perhaps forgive him, not before. I have always in my mind a remembrance of you as you were when I first saw you. You are as handsome now as you were then,—handsomer; but he has destroyed your youth."

"Yes; but it is not my youth I regret," she said. "Youth has always seemed to me unlovely in its intense vanity and thoughtless selfishness. I know very few lovable young people."

"Possibly," said Oldham; "but has it been your experience that old people have been much more admirable? For my part, I think that life appears to teach people nothing. When I see them on the verge of the grave still holding on to all those worthless baubles, to which they have perhaps sacrificed their lives, with all the tenacity of which they are capable, still worldly, malicious, and envious, it makes me sick at heart. If it were only themselves they injured one might forgive them; but having lost the power that youth, beauty, or position once gave, they make as tyrannical a use as possible of that which circumstances have left them. I had an old uncle once, who was the terror of the whole household; those about him were perfectly helpless in his hands, for when thwarted he would work himself into a fit of anger which would nearly cause his death.

Your acquaintance with the aged has evidently been limited, Mrs. Fanshawe; had you seen some of the specimens which it has been my misfortune to meet, you would acknowledge that they outrival youth in heartless selfishness."

Oldham left Tetherby with much regret, and though his visits at Fern Bank had been few, Theo missed their daily walks through the lanes or along the shore. Exercise with no object in view was detestable to her, therefore she seldom left the grounds, and devoted the best part of her time to writing. Ere the autumn days came, the manuscript of her novel was in the printer's hands.

Ethelbert arrived quite unexpectedly about the end of August. With his usual impetuosity, he had left Berlin at a moment's notice, and his advent put Theo's quiet little *ménage* into quite an uproar.

"Law, mem!" said Julia, on the verge of tears, "there ain't a mortal thing in the 'ouse. Whatever shall I do?"

"Mr. Ethelbert is not so very particular, Julia; a bit of fish and a chop will be all that he will require. And you cook them so nicely," she added, consolingly.

Ethelbert's delight proved the truth of her words. Everything was pronounced perfect, not only the cooking, but the house, garden, and Theo herself. After dinner the brother and sister found their way by the private path which ran down the cliff from the Fern Bank grounds to the shore.

The Reverend Richard Swame, rector of Tetherby, accompanied by his grenadier of a wife and innumerable daughters,—the man of God was blessed, or cursed, with many olive-branches,—came face to face with them

as they gained the esplanade. They eyed the newcomer with curiosity.

"Look, mamma! there is another one," whispered Miss Swame, in a tone of repressed excitement.

"Who is the giantess with the devil-dodger? She looked as though she had been eating vinegar off a knife as she passed us," elegantly remarked Ethelbert.

"The rector and his family," answered Theo; "and the party of mutes which has just joined them consists of the curate and his family. People who produce children with the incredible rapidity of those excellent persons should be forced to emigrate. England is overpopulated as it is."

"So they have not called?"

"No; thus far they have spared me."

Ethelbert gave a low whistle. "Look here, Miss Theo," he said, putting on an expression of preternatural gravity, "it don't look well not to know the clergyman of the parish. Mind you, I uphold you in your refusal to live with that brute, Fanshawe; only for Hugh, I should have called the villain out and put a bullet through his confounded head; but you must not sink into a nobody, and expose yourself to the snubs of a pair of miserable country parsons."

Theo laughed aloud. "Dear old boy," she said, "the pair of country parsons have not the power to snub me, inasmuch as I won't be snubbed; were they dukes instead of parsons they would be utterly powerless, as far as I am concerned."

Bertie was only half convinced; his mother had so impressed him with the fact of poor Theo's utter want of common sense, that he began to consider himself

justified in bestowing upon his sister the inestimable boon of his valuable advice. Though he loved her more than ever now in the hour of her adversity, and burned to avenge the insults which had been offered her, he nevertheless entertained a less exalted opinion of her capabilities, in that she had failed so lamentably in her married life.

"I shall be obliged to leave you to-morrow, dear old Theo," he said, as he kissed her good-night.

"Oh, Bertie! not really! I had hoped for a good long visit." The tears were in her eyes.

"Well, you see, it is an engagement of such long standing, and Featherstone asked me for the first. I must give myself a few days in town, and at least a week at the manor. After my visit to Warwickshire I will come back, if you will ask me."

"Ask you!" repeated Theo; "I shall insist upon it. Who are these Featherstones?"

"Awfully nice people, and the secret of my anxiety to go there is that the prettiest girl in all England—in the whole world, for that matter—is staying there,—Mrs. Featherstone's sister, Beatrice Sutherland. By the way, Cynthia Trowbridge is a great friend of theirs."

"Oh, Bertie! I hope you are not *épris* of a woman like Mrs. Trowbridge."

"So-h!" exclaimed Bertie, giving the word a real German intonation; "we have fallen out with our quondam friend, the fairy-like Cynthia!"

"I never fall out, as you call it, with any one," said Theo, quietly, "but I would wish you to marry a more serious woman than Mrs. Trowbridge."

She would not deign to enter into her reasons for

objecting to Cynthia, and Ethelbert inwardly chuckled, observing that "it was the way that women's great friendships always ended."

"Miss Sutherland is no more like that little flirt Cynthia than Jack is like—what is the French fellow's name who wrote the maxims?—La Rochefoucauld. You might as well compare a saint to a grisette."

"I don't know that I am very fond of saints," said Theo. "We have one excellent specimen of that kind of female in the family, in the shape of our respected cousin, Lady Atherling. Oh, Bertie! Hugh looks so ill, I'm afraid that he is dreadfully unhappy."

"Poor old fellow! I hope not. Ida isn't a bad sort, after all; I always got on with her like a house on fire. She's a lady, and a credit to any man."

"I don't know how it is, every time I see her I dislike her more and trust her less."

"Oh, you women never know anything about each other! Never mind Ida, Theo; tell me what money you want; that's what I came to see you about. You don't suppose I'll let my sister live like a nun for the sake of the 'rhino'?"

"I'm very comfortable without the 'rhino,' as you call it, Bertie."

"I shall write you a check for a hundred, at any rate."

"You may do as you like about that, but I am not bound to cash it," laughed Theo.

Theodora watched her brother drive off the following morning with a less heavy heart than she would have imagined possible. She could not feel friendless or forsaken with two such friends as Ethelbert and Hugh.

CHAPTER XIII.

"NUDUM PACTUM."

"Show me a man who has detected the injustice of a law, the absurdity of a tenet, the malversation of a minister, or the impiety of a priest, and who has not been stoned or hanged or burnt or imprisoned or exiled or reduced to poverty."

SANDT.

"'NUDUM PACTUM,' what does it mean?" was the question asked by the lady portion of the reading public,—ladies not being expected to know Latin.

Theo's book was published at last. The usual amount of praise and abuse was accorded it by the discerning critics. Its novelty alarmed some timid souls, who pronounced it a dangerous book. After such an accusation its success was naturally assured. Theodora was surprised and delighted. Her publisher was less surprised, though even more delighted. He wrote a congratulatory letter, which was kind, and, what was more to the purpose, enclosed a check for four hundred pounds.

Theo held the check in her hand, and eyed it with awe. Any one, to have seen her, might have deemed her capable of the avarice which she had threatened to cultivate.

"The first money I have ever earned!" she said to herself, joyfully. "I feel as free as a bird. Oh, the joy of being able to help oneself!" As she stood there she became conscious that some one was tapping gently

at the French window, which opened on the lawn. She flew to open it, for she recognized Oldham.

"I am so glad you are come," she exclaimed, by way of greeting. "Look at that! To think that I can make such an immense sum of money, all the result of 'Nudum Pactum'! Have you read it? They were to send you a copy."

"Yes," he said, trying to look grave, "I have read it, and have come to ask you what in the name of Vishnu possessed you to present to the public that Magdalenian wail?"

"I thought that you would have liked it,"—in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"Like it! I more than like it. Don't you see, child, that an amiable world will draw a parallel between your marriage and the 'broken contract,' while they identify you with your sinful and repentant heroine?"

"How perfectly absurd!" said Theo, angrily, half turning from him as she spoke. "As to the title, I really cannot allow that to be apropos to my marriage or any other. Unfortunately, marriage is a contract not so easily annulled. As to my heroine,—Magdalen or not,—she is a far finer character than ever I can hope to be. If the book is a success, of course I shall be pleased. As to the public, let the public think what seemeth good to itself."

"Did you ever hear of the gates of Busyrane, on the first of which was written, 'Be bold;' on the second, 'Be bold, be bold, and evermore be bold;' while the inscription on the third ran, 'Be not too bold'? *De te fabula.*"

"Thanks," said Theo, dryly. "I am afraid that

your very good advice will be wasted. Unfortunately, half-measures are impossible to me. Since you disapprove of the book, let us drop the subject and talk of something else."

"Now you are angry, and without reason. I disapprove of the book? What an erroneous idea! I delighted in it; the more so that I recognized you yourself in every line; still, I am afraid it is a trump card in the enemy's hands. The only fault I find with it is that Edith repents too soon. People are seldom deeply impressed with a sense of their own sinfulness until the effects of their evil doings begin to make themselves felt. Moreover, she was far more interesting while she was weak, loving, and wicked. I should not have killed off that exasperating piece of perfection, Amy; those kind of women live forever, making every one about them uncomfortable."

"I became so furious with her," Theo said, penitently, "that I was obliged to murder her. She was affecting my entire views of life and ruining my digestion. My cousin's wife in *propriâ personâ* could not have produced a more baneful effect. But why do you not scold me for having purloined some of your own clever thoughts and sayings?"

"I was unconscious of them. The book was charming to me because of its thorough originality. Believe me, you have a great gift; only don't let the world turn it against you, as it has a knack of turning all that is best in us."

"Why have you never attempted a novel yourself?" Theo asked.

"Ah, Mrs. Fanshawe, it would be a sermon."

"Apropos of sermons and all things orthodox, Bertie was here and blighted me on the subject of my excommunicated condition, saying that I should visit at the rectory."

"And what may Master Bertie be doing in England?"

"Falling over head and ears in love at the present time with some transcendently beautiful creature who lives in Warwickshire. She is the sister of the Mrs. Featherstone with whom he is staying."

"Featherstone? It must be Ralph Featherstone; but he cannot have a marriageable daughter."

"But I told you it is his wife's sister."

"Ah, Beatrice Sutherland! She must have developed into a very beautiful woman; she promised it. I saw something of them two or three seasons since. Master Bertie has excellent taste."

"And she is nice and ladylike," said Theo, with a sigh of relief. "I am glad; I so feared that it might be some stupid entanglement. It seems to have been very sudden."

"Sudden, is it? And yet she looked like a woman 'worth the wooing.' Is it quite decided?"

"No, I think not; but Bertie seemed very confident."

"Well, he is a lucky young dog, for a more perfect creature I have seldom seen. Her sister told me something of her life, too, which, unlike most biographies, was interesting."

"I should have supposed her too young to be the possessor of anything so undesirable as a history."

"It can hardly be called her own. She is half-sister to Mrs. Featherstone. Some years after the death of

his first wife, an entirely uninteresting Englishwoman, their father married a beautiful Italian girl with twopence halfpenny for a fortune and a long pedigree. Beatrice was the result of this union. I fell half in love with the Italian lady, though Mrs. Featherstone spoke of her with small affection and much scorn. I fancy that the poor little thing found her husband's relations too cruelly respectable at all events. When Beatrice was yet a baby her father became suddenly dangerously ill of consumption. Leaving the child to the care of her husband's sisters, Mrs. Sutherland accompanied him to her old home, fully persuaded that Italy would cure him if anything could. In six months' time he was dead. The only news which they have ever heard of his wife was when her father wrote to acquaint them of Mr. Sutherland's death and request they would keep the little orphan still with them, as his daughter was in no fit mental condition to claim the guardianship of her own child."

"Great heavens! I hope there is not madness in the family," exclaimed Theo. "Of all things the most horrible."

"There is madness in most families, more or less," said Oldham. "Probably the old Italian was glad enough to get rid of the child; he was not exempt from the proverbial poverty of Italian counts. In that way the poor girl has been in a measure abandoned. I gathered from what Mrs. Featherstone said that her father's sister, Miss Sutherland, whom I once met and have ever since persistently avoided, had taken Beatrice under her protection. Now I have told you the entire history of the Sutherlands I must be off, for I must

dine in London town this night. You have forgiven me my warning about the book?"

"Oh! I don't mind in the least since you acknowledge that you think well of it. If you will wait half a second I will walk with you to the station. You have oceans of time; the train is always late."

Theo watched the train stealing slowly from the station. Returning home by the village, she bethought her that the evening mail was already in, and stopping at the post-office inquired for letters.

"Yes, mum; three for Fern Bank. Fine evening, mum."

As Theo made her way homeward through the quiet lanes, she drew the letters from her pocket. "From mamma," she said, tearing open the envelope.

"Theodora," the letter ran, "you have completed the humiliation which you have already brought upon us by the publication of a book, which I am informed is atheistical in its tendency and lax in its moral tone. I have not read 'Nudum Pactum,' and shall not read it. Theodora, I call upon you to suppress that book; if you don't, I shall. Read your Bible; it will tell you that children are not to provoke their parents to wrath. What will be your husband's feelings I dread to think. Remember that your deeds reflect upon him. You are part of himself, Theodora, as Eve was formed from the rib of Adam," etc.

"If there is a thing that annoys me," said Theo to herself, as she viciously tore the letter into a thousand bits, "it is to be a called a rib. Children, provoke not your parents to wrath, indeed! I think mamma had better read her own Bible. She would tell us that 'God

tempers the wind to the stalled ox,' next, and swear the quotation is from holy writ. I don't know this handwriting. Well, upon my word! 'A well-wisher, one who is a sincere friend of Mrs. Alfred Fanshawe, supposes she was led to publish "Nudum Pactum" for the sake of the large sum which she doubtless received for that godless book. Mrs. Fanshawe evidently forgets 'que la nécessité ne doit point obliger un homme à se manquer de respect à lui-même, et ce n'est point du poison qu'il faut vendre, pour avoir du pain.'" This production was signed "A Christian Friend."

"Upon my word, my Christian friend," said Theo, thoroughly amused, "since you saw fit to favor me with an anonymous epistle, you might have been original. Now for Hugh. I hope he will not find it necessary to abuse my bantling." Hugh's letter ran:

"FEATHERSTONE COURT, FEATHERSTONE.
"September 24th.

"Who was it, dear Theo, who exclaimed, 'Would that mine enemy would write a book'? Theo, Theo, the Philistines are upon thee! We only returned to England a few days since, and already I have heard enough to claim the book and fight your battle; for fight there will be. The book is clever, too clever in fact; something mediocre would have sold as well, and pleased more. Your mother is in despair. I have received a letter from her begging me to remonstrate with you. I asked her to read the book,—she has not yet done so,—and consoled her by saying that it had been greatly admired. You will be surprised to hear of me from this place, but judging from the tone of your last letter, which

I found awaiting me on my return from the continent, you are anxious on Bertie's account,—an anxiety which I in a great measure shared. I have been slightly acquainted with Colonel Featherstone for many years; it was therefore with no difficulty that I obtained an invitation to visit here. I arrived in my usual character of mentor, fully prepared to oppose, as far as lay in my power, a union between Miss Sutherland and Ethelbert; knowing him to be young, inexperienced, and blinded by passion, relying on my own sober judgment, and partly on his sincere affection for me. How shall I find words in which to confess my weakness? I saw the young lady and laid down my arms. Miss Sutherland has every grace and virtue. Is she pretty?—that is always a woman's first question, and I am sure that you are at this moment asking it. My feeble pen cannot begin to describe her. Nothing short of a poem could do that. She is tall,—not so tall as you are, but about the average height. Her hair is of that light brown which, in these days of golden locks, is seldom seen; grave, sad Italian eyes of the deepest brown, sheltered by heavy white lids which are seldom raised, but when they are, those large brown orbs look at you full of unutterable thoughts, too deep for words; a complexion which no English maid ever rivalled, clear and healthy, though almost colorless; a drooping, pathetic mouth, which is often tremulous with emotion. I can see her now from the window, and looking upon her, feel how inadequate are my words to describe her. She is pacing the lawn, her sister's children clinging to her heavy black dress; these children adore her, she being one of those natural-born mothers, patient, restful, tender,

whom children with their true instincts love and trust. Ethelbert, poor fellow, has poured endless hopes and fears into my ears. As yet he has not proposed for Beatrice, though Mrs. Featherstone, a nervous, exacting little person, with a voice like a peacock, evidently expects him to do so, and is prepared to be a very warm advocate for his claims. It is impossible to fathom Miss Sutherland's feelings; she is so gently courteous to all that there is no change perceptible in her manner when Ethelbert approaches. I notice, however, that he succeeds in making her face, ordinarily so grave, break into a smile more often than others. I thought, when I saw her smile first, of Tennyson's lines:

> "'Then the world were not so bitter
> But a smile could make it sweet.'

"You are amused, I am sure, and perhaps accuse me in your heart of sentimentalizing. To return, therefore, to common sense. Looking at Bertie as the future Earl of Atherling (it is a light in which I love to regard him,—again you will smile, perhaps sneer at my family pride, which I know seems to you but a poor thing,—I am ready to receive Miss Sutherland as a future countess with acclamation; he could not find a more queenly little head upon which to place his coronet. She is a lady, not only in manner, that is not rare, but in heart and thought. The sight of her kneeling in the village church yesterday, with pure, downcast face and intent on thoughts far from earth, was a rebuke to our worldly lives and lukewarm faith. She seemed to me holiness personified, and yet I hear no word bearing on subjects religious pass her lips. In one word, she is a beautiful and pure-

hearted woman, whom those who are worthy will love, and whom all must respect. My unselfish Theo will echo my wish that the happiness which has escaped us may be accorded to our dear Bertie, whose deserts are great, and who will know how to treasure the prize which he has won. My wife is to join me here in two weeks' time. I am strangely disinclined for work lately, but there is plenty in store for me when I return to King's Gift; though I shall find time to pay Fern Bank another visit. Geddes has asked permission to take a look at the garden before winter sets in. You must not refuse, for it will be a pleasure to the old man. I have often envied him his intense love for his work. I believe after all that is the true happiness, to devote oneself to some one thing, with an honest desire for success. Your affectionate cousin,

"ATHERLING."

Theo could not resist the temptation of showing this epistle to Reginald Oldham when next he found his way to Fern Bank, which he did ere many days had elapsed. He was, in fact, a little anxious on her account.

"I cannot help being amused at Hugh's enthusiasm, it sounds so unlike him," said Theo.

"His description is not a bad one. I wonder is her ladyship's sanctity the subject of such encomiums?"

"If you only knew how detestable she makes herself with her religion, you would understand my aversion to her."

"I have heard her virtues highly lauded. A friend of mine, Colman the painter, has produced a very excellent picture, in which her ladyship, in the character

of Madame de Chantal, is represented departing for her convent, accompanied by Saint Francis of Sales, and surrounded by her weeping family."

"Ida would look the part to perfection. Madame de Chantal is a person for whom I have always entertained the deepest contempt. Fancy a woman professing such noble and exalted sentiments, such divine affection, yet capable of forsaking her old father and her children; so absorbed in her care for her own soul and warped by religious enthusiasm that her views of life's duties were all distorted."

"Like Montesquieu's curé, who could see nothing through the telescope save the village steeple?"

"Precisely! What is it that makes so many religious people so insupportable?"

Oldham smiled. "It is very natural," he said. "They undertake a task beyond their strength, lead unnatural lives, and are therefore unhappy; they suffer, and when people suffer they take care that those about them should participate therein."

"I don't believe that Ida suffers. She is too perfectly self-satisfied, too supremely confident in her own superiority. Of all the people I know I should imagine her the happiest."

"Not even excepting the husband of such a paragon?"

"Alas, poor Hugh! it would have been better for both of us had we obeyed our respective mammas. Did I ever tell you that we were originally intended for each other?"

"Indeed? I had imagined that your interest in him arose simply from a cousinly regard." Reginald winced as he spoke.

"So it was; the most platonic of regards. We were even mutually distasteful to each other years ago, but might have been comfortable, even happy, in our married life. Entire confidence and respect might make even a loveless union happy, while a certain indifference on the woman's part is rather desirable than otherwise."

"I can't agree with you, Mrs. Fanshawe; perhaps, being a man, it is natural that I should not. We are all selfish, you know, and I for one am willing to acknowledge that I would prefer a wife with unbounded capabilities for admiration, who would not question my sovereign will and pleasure, and with perceptive faculties slightly undeveloped that she might never discover how poor a creature I am in reality."

"Ah, I know the style of person you would admire! A man's woman, the patient Griselda kind, and such spiritless mortals! A woman of that stamp is detestable to me. I have no sympathy for people lacking self-respect."

"I am not professing admiration for my ideal wife, far be it from me; but I maintain that she would be a comfortable person to sit at one's fireside."

"Please let her remain ideal," said Theo, as he rose to leave, "for I shall lose my friend once she occupies that place by his fireside."

Oldham's face was very gloomy as he made his way to the station.

"She need not have said so plainly that she regretted her cousin," he said to himself. "What does she see in him? For my part, I always look upon him as a political machine. I wonder if she believed my non-

sense about the ideal wife? I dare say that she did, and despises me accordingly. I won't come here again, better not. Yes, I will; she has called me her friend, and her friend I will be, come what may, and hide my cursed folly as best I can. If suffering come of it, it will fall upon me; she shall never know."

He stepped into the train, black care beside him, and a jealousy, which he was too proud to acknowledge even to himself, gnawing at his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEATRICE.

"She must be courteous, she must be holy,
Pure in her spirit, the maiden I love."

Lord Atherling had found a pleasant party assembled at Featherstone Court. Mr. and Mrs. Trowbridge and a young Austrian officer were the only guests, with the exception of himself and Ethelbert. Mrs. Featherstone was a lively little person, and would have been quite charming had it not been for an irritating little way she had of interfering with every one and everything. She taught the men how to play billiards, and the women how to do their fancy-work, write their letters, or what not; in fact, it was impossible for any one to attempt work or play without bringing down on his devoted head an avalanche of advice from the

little lady. Of politics, like most people of her sex and station, she was wofully ignorant; but, supposing such subjects to be the only ones interesting to Lord Atherling, she propounded theories, and made the wildest assertions apropos to the government of the country. His lordship could only stand before her, listening in wonder, bowing his head in acquiescence when appealed to, struck dumb by the woman's astounding ignorance. Her husband was in every way her reverse, silent where she was talkative, indifferent, phlegmatic, and coldly selfish, while she was interested in every human being to the extent of making herself their confidant. The very servants in the kitchen confided their love-affairs to their mistress, and were pleased when she appeared interested.

Colonel Featherstone had three weaknesses,—he loved money, he loved a great man, and he loved his wife, though he would have sacrificed her to his own whims a hundred times a day; still he loved her as much as a perfectly selfish person can love any one. He had one hobby,—ornamental timber. People used to say that Colonel Featherstone was a sensible man and that his wife was a fool. The colonel had gained this reputation cheaply, as many another man or woman has done before him, by his natural or unnatural silence. He had no temptation to speak, having nothing to say, whereas his wife could not resist the delight of talking whenever she could procure a listener. Neither ever made a remark worth chronicling. People used to wonder how it was possible that Mrs. Featherstone, who talked so much, could have escaped the saying of some one thing which might be carried in one's mem-

ory; but, upon the whole, Colonel Featherstone was considered a sensible, reliable man. He prided himself upon his justice, though he ground down his tenants, and had never been known to give away so much as half a crown; whereas his wife had done many deeds of kindness, as the poor could testify. Poor Mrs. Featherstone's tongue, however, made enemies even of those to whom she had proved a true friend; whereas her husband was too thoroughly indifferent towards all the world to trouble himself to make remarks derogatory or otherwise. All the world repaid him in kind, and was as supremely indifferent as himself.

"I am always so afraid," Beatrice confided to Ethelbert, "that I shall forget to bid him good-by when I leave."

Her words most thoroughly described the effect which he had on most people.

"When do you intend putting it 'to the touch to win or lose it all,' Ethelbert?" asked Lord Atherling, one morning, as, guns in hand, they made their way across the fields which skirted the Featherstone demesne.

"Whenever I can pluck up courage. Hugh, have you noticed that she has seemed to avoid me lately?"

"Avoid you! I thought that you seemed to monopolize her pretty well."

"I wish that you would speak to her for me, old boy," said Bertie, in a pleading tone. "You seem to have so much to say to each other that I am sure she is inclined to like you. She never talks much to other fellows; perhaps she would listen to you."

"I can't," Hugh said, bending his head over the lock of his gun, which he became suddenly deeply interested

in. "If you cannot persuade her, my dear fellow, a third party certainly can't."

"But I am so puzzled about her. She promised to think about it when I first spoke,—a few days after my arrival it was,—and yesterday, when I said something, —I forget now what,—she turned quite white, and begged me to remember that there was no engagement between us. Perhaps, Hugh, if you were to ask her, she might be more inclined to speak freely and tell you what is in her mind. I can't lose her, Hugh," the poor boy continued, the tears in his eyes. "I never felt like this about anything before; but I'll never give her up, never. Do, like a good fellow, speak for me."

By dint of much coaxing Ethelbert at last prevailed, and extorted a promise from his cousin that he would seek an interview with Beatrice and endeavor to ascertain what were her real sentiments. The following morning, therefore, Lord Atherling made his way to the library, where he was sure to find Miss Sutherland from breakfast-time to luncheon. She was sitting in the bay-window sill, her face bent over a huge volume. So intent was she that Hugh entered unnoticed, and stood for a moment gazing at the outline of the pure profile and slight, delicate figure against the light. With that subtle instinct which we have all of us experienced she felt his presence, and raised her eyes from her book. He came and stood near her.

"What may that ponderous volume contain? All the wisdom of the philosophers, judging from its size," he said, smiling.

"Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.'"

"Rather dull reading for a young lady, I should imagine."

"I enjoy it," Beatrice said. "If it were less heavy, —I mean as to weight,—I should like it better. Perhaps, Lord Atherling, you would like the room to yourself? Mr. Baskervyle tells us that you have any amount of parliamentary business which cannot be neglected."

"Please don't leave me," Hugh said, laying a detaining hand upon her arm. "The fact of the matter is, I followed you here for the express purpose of discussing a very important subject."

He thought that the fair face turned a shade paler, but she merely bowed her head, and he continued:

"You are cruel without meaning to be so, Miss Sutherland, in keeping poor Bertie so long 'twixt heaven and earth; he has asked me to be his ambassador, else I should not have taken the liberty of addressing you on the subject. May I bid him hope? As the head of the family I may, I hope, say how glad we shall be to receive you as one of ourselves."

Lord Atherling spoke as one who had learned something by rote. His eyes were fixed upon the window, but I doubt if he saw anything beyond.

Beatrice was too occupied to notice anything peculiar in his manner, and only recognized the kindness of his words, which made the task before her doubly difficult. The silence was unbroken for several minutes, and then she spoke in a low voice:

"You are very kind; I cannot sufficiently thank you; but since I gave that foolish half-promise to your cousin, which should never have been given, I have

come to know that it would be impossible for me to keep it. Do not think too badly of me," she continued, laying her hand upon his arm, with an appealing gesture. "I have been weak, but not wantonly cruel. You do not understand; no one can who is ignorant of my position. I am a dependent in all save name. I should lack daily bread were it not for my aunt's bounty; she has fed and clothed me since I was an infant. My mother"—her voice trembled as she uttered what should be to all children the sweetest word, while by this time the great tears, which had been slowly gathering in her eyes, rolled one by one down her cheeks—"my mother, so they tell me, has forsaken me; there is no human creature in all the world upon whom I have any claim, save my aunt and my half-sister. When they urged me to accept Mr. Baskervyle I did not dare oppose them, so in a weak moment I asked for time to think about it, as though all the thinking in the world would bring love. I do not love him, Lord Atherling, but he has been my friend; though even that will be over now. How can I live a life of deceit? Women have done it, I know, but I cannot, I cannot, and deceive one so true, so loving as Ethelbert. Lord Atherling, you must help me: try to dissuade him; tell him that I am poor and of no family; it is true enough. He should marry better,—some one of importance in the world, some one of whom he might be proud."

Hugh looked down upon the exquisite patrician face now raised eagerly to his own with a tender smile.

"All very excellent arguments, Miss Sutherland, but not very convincing to a man in love."

The eager face dropped.

"Could you not say that you have personal objections? They will be so angry with me."

Her face was drawn and white while she spoke. Seeing the pained look in his eyes, she continued:

"Don't be troubled about it, please. I know that you will despise me, and with good reason, too; but I hate to be found fault with. Angry words are like blows to me; besides, I feel that I owe them something. They have been very good, very good."

She came nearer to him as she spoke, and raised her beseeching eyes to his face.

"You had better tell Bertie what you have now told me," he said, slowly, averting his head. "I am sure that he will understand, though I am bound to tell you that he will never give up all hope until—until you become the wife of another."

"That will never be," she said.

"Why not?" he inquired, turning quickly towards her with a flushed face and a look in his eyes which caused her own to fall.

"Why not? Because I cannot."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of that "I cannot." She stood before him for one second pale as death to her very lips, then with hasty step she left the room.

Hugh seated himself in the window and began turning the pages of Gibbon's "Rome," but he saw no words of the book before him, and kept murmuring to himself, slowly, "It is impossible! impossible!" Here Ethelbert found him.

"Halloo! Have you seen her?" was his greeting.

"Yes," answered Lord Atherling.

"Well?"

"I am afraid, Bertie, you must give it up."

"Give it up! I think I see myself! Look here, Hugh, when I give it up, as you call it, it will be because I have given up everything save six feet of earth. Even should she marry another fellow I shall love her still."

Hugh groaned.

"But she says that she does not love you," he objected.

"No, I dare say not. Why the d—l should she? What is there in me to love? I don't ask her to love me, but to be my wife. What did you say to persuade her?"

"What could I say? Bring forward that you are to be my heir, and will probably outlive me for many years? that her son would be the Earl of Atherling in any case, and inherit one of the finest properties in England? I don't think all this would have had much weight with her."

"I wish to God it would!"

"I feel for your disappointment, Bertie," said his cousin, holding out his hand to his young kinsman, "and I don't wonder at it; she is beautiful and good."

"Thanks, old fellow," said Bertie, clasping the hand with warmth. "Don't you fret; she will marry me yet, please God,—marry me to get rid of me," he continued, with a great laugh, "and, perhaps, some day learn to love me, too."

Lord Atherling did not speak, but his silence passed unnoticed by Bertie, who was full of plans and hope for the future.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN AUTUMN TINGED THE FLOWERS.

"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
A devotion to something afar
From this sphere of our sorrow."

SHELLEY.

As the day approached for Lady Atherling's arrival, Beatrice heard very conflicting opinions expressed regarding the expected guest.

"My dear, she's a horror; if any one can be more intensely correct than his lordship 'tis his spouse. He can be disagreeable at times, though he admires you so extravagantly that I dare say that you have not discovered the fact; but a woman can always exceed a man in general unpleasantness," said Mrs. Trowbridge. "I am bored to death by Count Bothmar, but I am keeping him on and off for the express purpose of shocking my lady."

"You will be pleased with my cousin's wife," Bertie had said; "she's serious and all that sort of thing, goes about visiting the poor, and is interested in public charities. She's always been very good to me, and makes Hugh a capital wife. He is such a particular fellow about women. A slangy woman or a flirtatious woman, like our little friend Mrs. Trowbridge, for instance, would have driven him out of his mind. My

sister Theo hates her, but then Theo is easily prejudiced."

"Is she pretty?" Beatrice asked.

"Not exactly pretty, but most people admire her in a sort of a way; her figure is pretty, though she's thin. You see she looks so thoroughbred, which is a great thing."

"Yes, I suppose it is. Is—is Lord Atherling very devoted?"

Ethelbert laughed. "You are thinking that poor old Hugh is not looking particularly elated to-night, considering that it is the eve of her expected advent. I don't know that he is what ladies call devoted, but he must be fond of her, for he might have married any one, and she was a sort of companion to his mother; but I told you the story."

"Yes, you told me. Yes," she repeated, looking up to where Lord Atherling stood listening to one of Mrs. Featherstone's effusions, "he must love her."

Lady Atherling arrived the following day.

Beatrice, secreted behind one of the drawing-room curtains, saw a slight figure descend from the brougham and follow her sister into the house. Of her ladyship's face she caught no glimpse, a thick veil covering it. Mrs. Featherstone came into the room presently.

"Well, my dear, the countess has arrived," she exclaimed. "Just the kind of person I should have expected his wife to be; not pretty exactly, but excessively ladylike. After all, Beatrice, there is a great deal in blood."

"But I thought that she was the former Lady Atherling's companion."

"Well, and suppose she was. A woman takes her husband's rank."

"Yes, Elizabeth, but not his blood," replied her sister. "You were talking about Lady Atherling's birth. I always thought it had been quite humble."

"Well, it don't matter now, my dear; she is Lady Atherling at all events, and I call her exceedingly *distingué*. I hope that you will be nice to her, Beatrice, because of Ethelbert."

Beatrice winced, as she always did now, poor child, at the mention of that name, and, not wishing to prolong the conversation, made for the piano and began searching busily through her music for something to play. Beatrice was one of those delightful performers who never play either very long pieces or any of those impossible discordant productions which it has lately been the habit to admire.

"Not play any of Wagner's, Miss Sutherland!" a musical young lady had exclaimed, speaking with scornful surprise from the height of her superior knowledge. "Dear me! I could not exist without him!"

"It is fortunate that you happen to be contemporaries," Beatrice had said, with that soft smile of hers, and perhaps a vein of satire lurking in her voice. She now chose one of Schumann's sweetest "Kinderscenen," "Träumerei," and played it with all the dreamy languor which the music so well expresses.

Her sister left the room, like Eve, "on household cares intent." Still Beatrice played on, trying to drown the troubled thoughts which her sister's words had awakened.

Lord Atherling came in through the French window presently.

"What a delicious thing that is, Miss Sutherland!" he said, leaning against the piano, where he could see her face without making her conscious that his eyes were riveted thereon. "It is so delightful to hear some music nowadays, when we are suffering from a classical craze!"

Beatrice played on, gliding presently into the "Schlummerlied." Hugh, his soul in his eyes, stood gazing at her.

"Are you just returned from shooting, Hugh?" said a soft voice by his side. If a thunderbolt had fallen, Lord Atherling could not have been more surprised; but he turned with apparent calmness to his wife,—for she it was,—and made answer,—

"Yes. I was not aware that you had arrived. I hope that you had a pleasant journey." He just touched her cheek with his lips as he spoke, and then went through a form of introduction:

"Ida, this is Miss Sutherland,—Mrs. Featherstone's sister."

Lady Atherling gave Beatrice a curious look as she returned her bow.

"I have heard a great deal of Miss Sutherland," she said, a world of meaning in her voice. "It was her charming music which tempted me down. I hope that you will not cease playing because I am here," she said, graciously.

Theodora had once said that "Ida's manner was a triumph of good breeding, when she chose." It certainly was on this occasion. A surprise is always an

awkward thing, but her easy graciousness made everything comfortable. For once, her husband even was thankful to her.

Ah! Lord Atherling, you will never see your wife's face unmasked, as she but a moment since saw yours, eloquent with hopeless love and grief and passion.

The welcome which Lady Atherling had accorded Beatrice was very different from that in store for Mrs. Trowbridge. Cynthia was greeted with a smile so cold that her own was frozen on her lips. Smarting under this rebuff, Beatrice found her sitting in a corner, awaiting, in common with the other guests, the ever-welcome summons to dinner.

"Did you ever behold anything so eccentric as that toilet?" whispered Mrs. Cynthia, spitefully. "She objects to *décolletée* dresses on principle, which, being interpreted, meaneth that she is too wofully thin to wear them. Do look at her figure in that black dress. Was ever anything so stiff, before or since? I've christened her the skeleton in armor."

"Why do you dislike her so?" Beatrice said. "You are not quite just. I think her figure is very pretty and her manners charming."

"Dislike her, my dear child? I don't dislike her," said Cynthia, shrugging her shoulders. "She is not alive enough either to like or dislike."

For the first time the evening appeared insupportably long. Lady Atherling entertained Mrs. Featherstone with a lengthy account of the church and schools of King's Gift, lamenting, more in sorrow than in anger, the Popish innovations introduced by the new curate.

"I soon put a stop to anything of the kind," she was saying. "Fancy, the man insisted upon placing a cross upon the communion-table! I wrote to him a very decided letter, saying that I objected to the cross either as an ornament for man or woman, or on the backs of prayer-books."

Beatrice was listening in horror and amazement. "Excuse me, Lady Atherling!" she exclaimed; "I think I must have misunderstood you. Did you say that you objected to the cross, the very sign and seal of our faith, provided we be Christians? It seems to me that under its shadow, if anywhere, we may all meet, no matter what the difference in mere doctrine may be."

"You forget, Miss Sutherland," said Lord Atherling, "that the religion of Christ has entirely disappeared, having been swallowed up by that hydra-headed monster 'the Church.'"

"Poor papa suffers so," here broke in Mrs. Trowbridge; "he says that were he to listen to all the disinterested advice he receives from meddlesome women, he would shortly part with his entire congregation. You were speaking of church matters," she added, innocently; "I may speak as one having authority, being a clergyman's daughter."

"*A clergyman's daughter, indeed!*" said Lady Atherling, concentrated surprise in every word.

There was a horrible pause, from which Mrs. Trowbridge was the first to recover.

"Are the children of beneficed clergymen supposed to have any outward and visible signs of their clerical parentage?" she asked, with a little laugh.

"It is not often that the church presents us with

anything so charming; it causes a natural surprise," said Lord Atherling, coming gallantly to the rescue. He distrusted the little woman, but felt obliged to atone, as far as lay in his power, for his wife's rudeness.

"There is a future for you, my lady!" said little Mrs. Cynthia, as she watched Lady Atherling from the room that night.

"I expect her ladyship is jealous of you, Cynthia," said Jack, with great brilliancy. "All women are," he added, tenderly stroking the chestnut hair.

Cynthia gave one of her silvery laughs.

"Just as though I would look at any man twice, while my dear Jack thought me worth looking at," she said, standing on tiptoe and raising two warm lips for a kiss.

"My darling," he said, covering the sweet face with kisses, "they don't know how well we love each other!"

"How should they," answered his wife, "when you leave me all day, you cruel man, for the pleasure of slaughtering a lot of innocent birds?"

"Cynthia, I'll never shoot again if you tell me not."

"Is it likely? Surely, you cannot think I am selfish enough to interfere with your pleasure? No, go and shoot with the others. Only it's very nice to see you come home again. And Jack, dear, be civil to Lord Atherling. He'll be of service to you."

Jack looked puzzled, but promised obedience.

Beatrice was coming slowly towards the house the next morning, the baby nephew in her arms and little Ralph clinging to her dress with childlike caresses, unconscious that a group at the window was watching her approach.

"But it is the Holy Virgin and child, attended by the infant St. John," exclaimed the Austrian. "Do you not see?"

Lady Atherling's face was a study as she said, severely,—

"I think, count, that your remark savors disagreeably of sacrilege; we are not used in England to hear serious subjects spoken lightly of."

"Mon Dieu! milady," said the count, beginning to expostulate, when Mrs. Trowbridge interrupted him.

"Your ladyship must acknowledge the resemblance; even your husband remarked it. Lord Atherling, was it not last Sunday that we were wishing for a painter who should take Beatrice as a model for the Mother of God?"

"It would be impossible to find one more pure and beautiful," said his lordship, gravely, as he passed through the French window and joined Beatrice and the children.

Ida watched him with an expression of face which was not good to see.

"Petite diablesse!" murmured the Austrian, as she followed Cynthia from the window.

"I think that I'm revenged for her amiable speech of last night," whispered that little lady, sinking into a chair.

The count took a seat by her side.

"Ah, madame! you have not considered ce cher milord; but she can be unpleasant,—it was cruel."

"Did you ever hear of killing two birds with one stone?" laughed Cynthia. "It's a game I generally play with success."

"Kill! Yes, you would do it, I believe; but not that angel, not Beatrice?"

"Beatrice? great heavens! no. Beatrice is my dearest friend."

"Soh! And your enemies, madame, how serve you them?"

"Ah! count, that is something you can never know," —with a tender look and smile, which might well have turned the head of a wiser man.

Then and there Count Bothmar's fate was sealed. He forgot his curiosity,—everything save the light of two bright eyes.

"'And when they look't into mine they split mine heart in two,'" whispered Ethelbert to Mrs. Featherstone, whose eyes he caught watching Mrs. Trowbridge with mild disapproval.

The little lady looked up in surprise, never having heard of Hans Breitmann.

"What a fool she is making of that idiotic German!" he continued, with all an Englishman's fine scorn for any one unfortunate enough to have seen the light for the first time in any land save Great Britain.

"She is very imprudent. I don't know what dear Lady Atherling will think," said Mrs. Featherstone, looking over towards the distant window from which Ida was still gazing.

"Oh! she will hope for the best and think the worst," said Bertie, with unwonted satire. "Mrs. Trowbridge is an awfully jolly little woman. As long as Jack is a fool, and don't mind, what difference does it make?"

"But other people are not fools," began Mrs. Featherstone.

"Oh, yes they are!" rudely interrupted Bertie. "Great fools, or they'd mind their own business and leave the little woman alone."

He walked off, leaving Mrs. Featherstone very anxious.

"If Beatrice is not careful he will be the next victim," she thought.

Mrs. Trowbridge in the mean time, quite unconscious how she was jeopardizing that valuable article, her reputation, continued the subjugation of the count. The dearest little feet in the most dainty of shoes peeped out from under the folds of her dress in the most natural way possible, while two tiny white hands, on which many kisses had been wasted, and over which many thousand vows, long since broken, had been breathed, lay so near his own that the poor man was half out of his mind. It was a mystery to the many friends and admirers of Mrs. Trowbridge how it happened that those little hands were always idle, although the number of smoking-caps, handkerchief-cases, and slippers which were presented to the favored few as their work might have sufficed to occupy their whole time. Lady Atherling presently left the room, accompanied by Mrs. Featherstone, and the flirtation having lost all interest for want of audience, Mrs. Cynthia joined Beatrice and the children on the lawn.

"Ah! my lord," she thought, as Hugh turned away at her approach. "Your secret is mine. I'm thinking that you will not refuse Jack your influence when the time comes."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

"For then, though I name thee not mistress or wife,
Thou art mine, and mine only, O life of my life!"

"BEATRICE, is there any one else?"

The speaker was Ethelbert, and he stood, his back against the library door, through which she would fain escape, her two hands imprisoned in his own. "Is there any other man whom you would marry?" He looked down into her dark eyes as he spoke, an eager anxiety in his own, while his voice trembled with emotion.

"No, no!" she made answer; "I shall never marry."

"Then I shall still hope," and he moved aside that she might pass; but she did not avail herself of the opportunity, but stood, the great tears falling one by one on to her black dress.

"Ethelbert," she said, at last, "there is no hope; indeed, indeed, you must forget it. There are thousands of girls who would make you a better wife than I ever could."

"There is no other woman in the world for me," he answered, doggedly. "You may despise me, if you like, but, so help me God, if you are not my wife, I'll call no woman by that name! You are not treating me fairly, Beatrice. If you are heart-whole, as you

say, you might at least try to love me. Your aunt and sister are willing, and you know how anxious my family is. Hugh has told you how awfully glad he would be. If you doubt the mater, she'll write to you herself."

"But if I do not love you! Oh, Ethelbert, what can I say to convince you that it is utterly useless?"

"Tell me that you love another man," he made answer.

For one moment she hesitated; then, turning from him with a low sigh, she sank into an arm-chair. She looked so white and wan that Ethelbert threw himself on his knees by her side, crying,—

"Love me, or love me not, I will never weary you again, my poor darling! You shall not be teased. I will explain everything to your sister."

"I would rather speak to her myself; she must understand that it can never be."

"Don't say that, Beatrice! never is a long day." He looked up at her with a smile, which she could not return. She was about to answer him, when the room door opened, and Lord Atherling stood before them. He would have retreated, but Ethelbert recalled him with,—

"Come in, old fellow! we shall monopolize your sanctum sanctorum no longer. You'll not need our advice in arranging the affairs of the nation, and I'm off to drag one of the ponds with Trowbridge."

Ethelbert was, in fact, delighted to escape the necessity of continuing his argument with Beatrice. He was fully determined not to take "no" for an answer, and the fact was beginning to force itself upon him that it

was the only answer which he was likely to receive; he left the room, therefore, without one word or look for Beatrice, who sat silent and miserable, feeling that the interview which had been so painful to her had passed off leaving her in the same wretchedly uncertain position in which it had found her. She looked up and found Hugh's earnest eyes fixed upon her. Woman-like, she turned for comfort to the person who happened to be nearest.

"My lord," she said, piteously, "he will not understand; he seems to imagine that I do not know my own mind, and that time will convince me of the fact. You men, I think, cannot realize how abhorrent to us a loveless marriage appears."

"Perhaps some of us know more about it than you imagine," Lord Atherling said, with something of bitterness in his voice.

Beatrice looked up at him in surprise, though she answered simply,—

"Marriage has never seemed to me to be so serious a matter to men as to women. The happiness of a man's whole life is not so entirely at stake; you have other duties, other joys, entirely independent of your home life."

"All that is very true, but you must acknowledge that to some natures those other duties and pleasures of which you speak could not in a great degree compensate for the want of love and tenderness. There was a time, not so very long ago, when I used to sneer at what I was pleased to call sentimentality, when my sole ambition was to shine in the career which I had chosen for myself. I have never frittered away my best

affections in small coin, Miss Sutherland. I have never loved any woman until—until," he hesitated for a moment, and then continued in a calm voice. "In common with most young men setting out on life's voyage, I landed ere long on my Calypso Island, and departed thence leaving Calypso to console herself, which she very shortly did. In early life I looked forward to a marriage with my cousin Theo as my probable fate, though she was far removed from being my ideal woman; could she have brought herself to love me our union might have been a happy one, but at the time we mutually misjudged each other. It was not until she was promised to another that, manlike, I did her tardy justice, and almost regretted her. She is a noble woman, and has been very, very unfortunate, which makes those who love her doubly tender. In early life she was an odd, unconventional girl, and would say things which shocked, almost repelled me.

"'Hugh,' she said to me one day shortly before her marriage, 'Ida Lyndall intends to marry you, and she will do it if you are not very careful, and very careful you must be. Wise men are the greatest fools where women are concerned.'

"I laughed at the time, Miss Sutherland," he went on, "but I was a fool,—a greater fool than Theo gave me credit for."

Beatrice looked up reproachfully.

"Do not speak like that," she said. "Your wife is a good woman."

"Child, child!" he cried, rising suddenly from his chair and pacing the floor with rapid step, "you do not know how my marriage came about, you do not

know how I was tricked and befooled. I do not know why I tell you the story. You are the only person to whom I have spoken on the subject. It came about, or was brought about, naturally enough. After my mother's and sister's death, both of which occurred at Scarborough within a few days of each other, Ida and I returned to King's Gift. Nothing could have exceeded her devotion and kindness during those dark days. As a nurse she is unparalleled,—quiet, watchful, self-confident, never over-anxious, never forgetful. I thought of all this as about two weeks after my mother's death I prepared for departure, and I fell to wondering what I could do to serve her. She herself broke in upon my reverie. With tears she told me of my mother's love and care for her, of her anxiety for her future.

"'She was more than a mother to me,' she cried, 'and this house has been the happiest of homes. How can I bear to leave it?'

"'But why leave it?' I urged. 'If you find it dull I will secure a companion for you, or you may travel.'

"To my dismay she refused my offer, sadly though firmly, saying that she had no claim upon me. It was in vain I argued, pointing out that it was not only my duty but my pleasure to be of service to her. Ida was invincible. I asked her at last if she were aware of any project that my mother might have formed regarding her future. For a moment she did not answer, then, half turning from me, she murmured that the plan which my mother formed for the future was quite impossible.

"'But why impossible?' I said. 'Tell me, Ida; there

is nothing I will not do to forward my mother's wishes and your welfare.'

"Then she turned her face towards me and said, with a blush, 'I cannot tell you.'

"In a moment her meaning flashed upon me; my mother had hoped for a union between us. 'And why not?' I thought. 'We two are equally alone in the world, and as it were in a measure belong to each other.'

"I can recall the whole scene as well as though it had occurred yesterday. A soft twilight filled the room; Ida stood beside me, her slight figure looking the more delicate and fragile for her heavy crape dress. 'Why not?' I said to myself. 'She is a lady, one who commands great respect and a certain admiration, one who will never bring contempt or disgrace upon the dear old name; above all, the woman whom my mother, who knew her so well, would have chosen for my wife. I am no sentimental school-boy to imagine that an overwhelming passion for the woman I marry is necessary.' Aloud I said,—

"'You mean, Ida, that my mother was wise enough to see how well suited we are to each other, and hoped that marriage, instead of separating her from her dear adopted daughter, would unite her even more closely.'

"She did not contradict me, Miss Sutherland, but her cheeks flushed and tears came into her eyes, making them pretty for once as they banished their usual watchful shrewdness, and in her face was a look which, fool that I was, I thought expressed a pure woman's tender love. I had been married about six months before I learned the truth. Strange to say, it was Theodora herself who opened my eyes, though most

unintentionally. We had been speaking of my mother, and I suppose that what I said conveyed to Theo's mind the impression that I doubted my mother's affection. Theo, who had loved her well, wished to convince me of her devotion to me, and begged me to read a letter which she had received from my mother not long before her death, forgetting that that same letter contained much which was far from complimentary to my wife, whom, it appeared from what was there written, my mother greatly mistrusted. She even acknowledged that she had feared that an affection might arise between us, adding that all danger of anything of the kind was now over, as Ida was engaged to the young rector of Atherling, whom, by the way, she heartlessly jilted, as I afterwards learned. I taxed her with the deception which she had practised upon me. She did not even attempt to deny it, only saying that I might consider myself fortunate in that I had not chosen Theo, as my mother would have wished. I had always been a proud man, Beatrice; I had never committed the thousand and one follies for which youth is famous, and in my marriage I was supposed to have shown that same calm good sense which had won for me such golden opinions from my friends and relations. They will never know the truth. I dare say that I deserve it all, but sometimes when I look at Ida's placid face it seems hard that the punishment should all fall upon me."

"I suppose that she loved you," Beatrice murmured. "You should remember that, and try to forgive her."

"Loved me, child? Do you suppose that she would have loved plain Hugh Baskervyle? She loves the

position, the title, the wealth which her marriage has given her. If I were to die she would doubtless regret it, for she would then sink into comparative obscurity; beyond that my existence or non-existence make small difference to her. She is a little afraid of me,—a feeling which I encourage,—and outwardly, at least, seldom opposes my wishes, which are few and not often expressed. The world doubtless looks upon us as a model pair, yet sometimes we live in the same house for weeks hardly exchanging a word. A cheerful picture of domestic bliss, is it not? She goes her way (in that respect I am a model; my confidence in my wife's rectitude is beautiful) and I go mine. I think that she would resent any woman taking her place, though what difference it would make to her I do not see. On that score she has small cause for alarm. I am not beloved of women, Beatrice. Why should I be? What have I to recommend me? Could any man be less of a hero of romance than I? You will not be surprised that my success among women should have been small."

He stopped in his restless pacing to and fro and stood looking down upon her. Beatrice, without raising her eyes, made answer,—

"I do not see why a woman should not love you. Perhaps you have never tried very hard to gain any woman's affection."

"There is something in that, I dare say. Well, it is too late now to try."

For a moment Beatrice hesitated; then, slowly raising her eyes to his, she said, with a little blush which made her sweet face almost childlike in its perfect purity,—

"Lord Atherling, I think you do your wife injustice. I think that she loves you."

"And why, in heaven's name, have you come to that conclusion?"

"Because,"—her voice faltered, while her blush deepened,—"because she watches you."

For all answer Lord Atherling laughed—a low, bitter laugh, expressive of anything but joy—as he turned from her, and continued his restless walking up and down, up and down, until Beatrice began to think that he had either forgotten her presence or was offended by her plain speaking. She rose at last, intending to leave the room. In a moment he was by her side. Taking both her hands in his, he looked into her eyes, a world of tender sadness in his own.

"Child, child!" he said, at last, "is it my misfortune or my fault that, since I have known you, the tie which binds me has become so intolerable that I know not how to bear it? In my younger days had any one told me that the companionship of a girl of your age would be fraught with danger to me, I should have laughed such a warning to scorn. Had they told me that the time would come when I should grudge Ethelbert what would make his happiness, do you suppose I would have believed them? And, above all, would I have believed that I, a married man of thirty-five, would ever stand here confessing a hopeless, unreasonable passion for a girl of your age, who can never feel aught for me save pity, not unmixed with scorn? I, of all men! Beatrice, you do not know how hardly I have judged others, the contempt which I have felt and expressed for men whose love has been unwisely disposed. What

has come to me, that all the strength which carried me through the temptations of youth should forsake me thus? Don't tremble so, my poor little Beatrice. Do you suppose, child, that I shall ever again give way like this? In the years to come, though we may be nearly connected, I shall seldom, if ever, look upon your face, and none will ever know what it has cost me to resign you. I ought to urge you to marry Ethelbert. I do urge you provided you can love him, for you are not a woman to be happy through a prudent compromise with life. And now go, and forget and forgive my madness. You need not tell me that even had I been free to offer you an honest love you could not have found it in your heart to accept it; I am not blind enough to suppose for one moment that there is anything about me to command any woman's love, much less the love of such an one as you; but tell me that you have forgiven me."

For one moment a feeling of faintness almost overpowered the girl; the room seemed to swim round with her, while she clung to Hugh's hands to save herself from falling. In an instant, however, she recovered herself, saying simply, "I love you. It is a misfortune, one which we should have foreseen. Hugh, I swear to you that I will never be the wife of any man. This promise is all that I can give you."

"Beatrice, Beatrice!" he cried, resisting a wild desire to take her into his arms; but she withdrew her hands, and without another word or look she left him. His head sank upon his hands. "What have I done?" he murmured. "Shared my heavy burden with the only woman whom I have ever loved, thus making it none

the lighter, and saddening her young life. Yet it is hard! hard! My God! how I could have loved her! how I could have loved her!"

When he again saw Beatrice she was a trifle pale, a little cold in her manner. Save for these signs he might have supposed the scene in the library but a dream; neither referred to it, and life, to all outward appearance, was the same to both as though that cry, "Beatrice, Beatrice!" had never thrilled every nerve of her heart and her solemn oath had never been spoken.

CHAPTER XVII.

BY THE WINDOW.

"Can I love thee, my beloved, can I love thee?
And is this like love to stand
With no help in my hand,
When strong as death I fain would watch above thee?
My love-kiss can deny
No tear that falls beneath it,
Mine oath of love can swear thee
From no ill that comes near thee,
And thou diest while I breathe it,
And I—I can but die!
May God love thee, my beloved! May God love thee!"

E. B. Browning.

It was suggested by Lord Atherling that the whole party should migrate to King's Gift for a few days. It was within driving-distance, and the change was welcome to all concerned. Mr. and Mrs. Trowbridge were

included in the invitation, much to Lady Atherling's annoyance, who was obliged, however, to second her husband, and did so with tolerably good grace. Perhaps she was not sorry for the opportunity for display which it gave her. Owing to the fact that his lordship was in deep mourning, she had as yet been unable to play the hostess. Beatrice had begged hard for permission to remain at Featherstone with the children, but vainly.

"Not go?" exclaimed her sister. "Nonsense! it is on your account that we are asked. I must say, I think it very kind of Lady Atherling. It will be positively insulting if you refuse to go."

"I wish that you would explain to Lady Atherling that I am not engaged to Mr. Baskervyle, if she extends to me an invitation on that account. I will not accept it."

"Well, my dear, all I can say is that you ought to be engaged to him if you are not. It simply amounts to this, that people will think that he has been trifling with you. Let me tell you, Miss Beatrice, that kind of thing does a girl no good. If you intend keeping men on and off in that manner, you'll die an old maid. The heir presumptive to an earldom is not picked up every day of the year by penniless young women."

"But I don't wish to pick them up," argued Beatrice. "It is no disgrace to be an old maid."

"I am glad that you find the prospect enticing, for it is evidently in store for you. If you refuse Ethelbert my aunt will never forgive you, and what you're to do if you offend her I am sure I don't know."

"I think that I might teach," the poor child said, in a low voice, swallowing her tears as best she might.

"Teach, indeed!" repeated her sister, scornfully. "Who do you suppose would employ you? Not ladies with husbands and sons, you may be sure!"

Beatrice flushed angrily.

"I don't know what you mean, Elizabeth; but I hope that I have never shown a predisposition towards other women's husbands. I think very few women are as perfectly indifferent towards men as I."

"The very thing of all others to attract, if you did but know it. No, Beatrice, you need not fly into a passion about it. When you talk of earning your own living it annoys me, even if it were not for the disgrace of the thing. You are too pretty, though you are so *dreadfully* un-English. I dare say many people would not admire you; but artists, and people who like that foreign style, think you quite beautiful. It would simply end in your coming here and relapsing into a kind of head-nurse to those children of whom you are so ridiculously fond. I appreciate my husband, I hope," with an air of conscious virtue, "but let me tell you to be a pensioner on Ralph's bounty is no sinecure."

"You need not be alarmed; I will never be dependent on Colonel Featherstone, and I shall never marry a man I do not love."

"I've no patience, Beatrice, with your ridiculous, sentimental ideas! Do you suppose that I loved Colonel Featherstone? I love him now, of course; but when I first married him he was an unmitigated bore to me, nothing more nor less. Still, as Aunt Amelia and I fought morning, noon, and night, I chose the lesser evil of the two. I don't repent it, and I have a

great deal to be thankful for. Aunt Amelia is not too pleasant when crossed; you've had enough experience of her by this time, I should suppose, to know that it is only because it is your nature to allow other people to bully you that you're in her good books; still, take my advice, and don't annoy her by refusing this invitation. It can do no harm; the mere fact of staying in his cousin's house does not oblige you to marry the man."

This was undeniable; and against her better judgment Beatrice yielded. Conscience said "Stay," but every pulse of her heart cried, "Go! it will be but for a few days, and then your lives divide forever. It is something to feel those kind eyes watching you, to hear that low voice speak your name."

With all her grave earnestness, Beatrice was but an inexperienced child; the temptation was too strong for her, and she went.

King's Gift awoke again to the world. Light blazed from every window; flowers filled the rooms; the chairs and sofas emerged from their brown holland coverings. Gas and Hugh were enemies, but wax candles shed their soft light from every candelabrum, lustre, and sconce throughout the great house.

The smiling housekeeper stood curtseying a welcome.

"His lordship gave particular orders that you were to have this room, miss," she said, ushering Beatrice into a beautiful little chamber hung with blue and white, and filled with a thousand pretty ornaments such as women love. "It was Miss Mabel's room," the old woman continued. "It was a sad loss, miss, to his lordship; he'll never be the same, I'm thinking."

Beatrice amused herself that evening with the books which had belonged to Mabel Baskervyle, among which was a photograph album,—Hugh in college cap and gown; Ida as a young girl, fifteen or sixteen, her fair hair falling on her shoulders, the same calm, expressionless face. Two photographs pleased Beatrice immensely,—one a young lady with large eyes, a firm mouth, and waving fair hair. She was curious enough to draw out the photograph in search of some clue to its identity. "For Mabel" was written on it, and underneath, "Theodora Baskervyle." So that was the Mrs. Fanshawe of whom she had heard so much. Hugh had not said that she was so handsome, and the picture which was on the same page must be her father's: the noble head and solemn brows were the same; there was even a little look of Ethelbert.

There was an edition of Shakspeare's plays, "From dear Hugh" on the title-page; "The Newcomes," from Cousin Theo; "Keble's Christian Year" and "Amy Herbert," from Ida Lyndall; and some dozens of books from "darling mamma." There were several pictures of this "darling mamma" hanging on the walls of the little room, which Beatrice recognized to be the same as the beautiful, sad face which had been pointed out to her as "the late Lady Atherling." Poor Beatrice experienced a cruel pang. Why had a mother's love been denied her? How willingly she would have changed with the dead girl to have known such love and tender care!

Such festivities as their presence at King's Gift occasioned were of the dullest, heavy dinner-parties being the nearest approach to gayety known in the country.

The day before their departure Lady Atherling had arranged a large dinner-party. She said, in answer to her husband's objections,—

"We must make some return for the civilities which every one has shown the Featherstones during their stay here. It is just as well that Miss Sutherland should be seen at our table if Ethelbert is to marry her."

"But there is no engagement between them," said Lord Atherling.

"Then she must be the most unprincipled flirt. However, Ethelbert is in earnest, and it is not very likely that she'll refuse him,—a girl without a penny, and only that kind of ethereal beauty which fades so soon to recommend her. I wish I could feel as sure that she is endowed with thorough religious feelings and principles as I am that she will not refuse an earl, even in prospective." She spoke with a quiet sneer, looking full into her husband's face.

"She might possibly jilt him, however, for an earl *de facto*, Ida. Women have done such things," he said, dryly, returning the glance.

There was a little room leading from the library in which Beatrice often took refuge. She avoided the drawing-rooms as much as was possible, for Ethelbert was always near her when she was there, and the meaning glances which were exchanged around her were more than she could bear. To this welcome haven she came; no one ever invaded it. In that respect was she safer than in her own bedroom, for there Mrs. Featherstone was very much at home. It was a damp, cold day; a bright fire was burning in the little grate, a few books were scattered about the table. The room had

been called "Hugh's study" in the old days, and a microscope, half a dozen charts, globes terrestrial and celestial, and a few anatomical specimens gave evidence as to the owner's tastes. Seated by the fire, Beatrice was soon lost in a reverie so profound that the opening door did not arouse her, and it was not until Hugh spoke that she was aware of his presence.

"I knew that I should find you here," he said. "It has always been the one peaceful place in the whole house. You should have enjoyed it unmolested, but this is your last day here, and I wished to speak to you."

Beatrice merely bowed her head in token that he might proceed.

"When we spoke last you gave a promise, you remember."

"I am not likely to forget it," she said, in a low voice.

"But you must forget it. I give you back your promise, dear; it is enough that one of us should be unhappy. Let the misery of it fall upon me. I am strong and able to bear it. I love you; I tell you so for the first time and the last. It is my misfortune, it must not become yours. You are sought in marriage by one of the best fellows God ever created; he loves you dearly, as dearly as any man can love a woman. You will bring him great happiness, and you will be happy yourself in time. You are so young, dear, so friendless, you cannot stand against this rough world alone, and I—I, who would lie down and die for you, am powerless. What can I do for you, child, save love you in silence, and never look on your sweet

face again? Marry Bertie, Beatrice; he is good and true. Forget me, dear; or, if you remember me, let it be to think tenderly of me as of one who is long since dead."

"How can you advise it?" she said, turning from him, and moving towards the window, by which she stood, gazing out into the gathering twilight. "You, of all people! Surely it is better to live honestly than dishonestly. If he did not trust me so entirely it would not seem so hard. I know that you advise me to marry him because you fear poverty for me. You know that I stand alone. Until I knew you I had no conception of what companionship might be, for my childhood and girlhood have been very lonely. Solitude, therefore, is not disagreeable to me; and as to poverty, why should I expect anything else? To you, who all your life have been surrounded by all the pleasant things which money brings, the want of it seems appalling: it is but natural that it should be so; but had I all your money, Hugh, I should not know what to do with it."

Hugh smiled, saying, "The mere possession of money does not mean much, child. One's life can be as utterly wretched with as without it. Nevertheless, I should be very sorry to see you in want of what could put you into a so much more desirable position. Beatrice, I am going to ask you a great favor. Will you let me provide for you in my will? If ever so little, it will be a comfort to me to feel that I have the power to do even that little for you. You need not be too proud to take it, then, when all those foolish scruples which influence us now shall have died with me. It is the one favor which I shall ever ask of you. You will not refuse?"

"I will not refuse; but God will have forgotten to be gracious when you leave me in this weary world alone! What is love, that it can change a whole life so? Two months ago I had never seen your face, and to-day the world holds only you; and if you were taken it would be as though all else had vanished with you. I can bear to part from you, Hugh, for I shall hear of you, and I shall know that I am always in your thoughts, as you are in mine. What is mere bodily presence? But that other parting! I could not live through that. Wherever your soul went mine would follow, and living, I should yet be dead!"

The girl spoke with a passion of which he had deemed her incapable, yet when he attempted to take her hand and draw her towards him she moved quickly away, and stood gazing from the window. How long she stood there in utter silence he never knew. His whole soul was stirred within him by the passionate love which breathed in every word which she had spoken. He was like a man who, stooping to pluck a lowly woodland violet, has found under the thick green leaves a wondrous rare flower. A low cry of great terror broke suddenly from Beatrice, a cry which brought Hugh to her side ere it was well uttered.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he cried. For all answer she could only point wildly towards the window. Hugh threw it open, but there was nothing to be seen save the driving rain through the gathering darkness.

"What has alarmed you so, child?" he said, approaching the chair upon which Beatrice sat, pale and trembling.

"As I looked from the window," she gasped, "I

became suddenly conscious of a dark figure outside, immediately opposite to me. It approached, and then I saw its white face quite close to mine. I tried to cry out, but for one moment I could not."

"Some prying servant," exclaimed his lordship, angrily. "That is the worst of these French windows." He drew the heavy curtains forward as he spoke.

"But, Hugh, you do not know, you have not heard, all. It was my own face which I saw,—my own face, but so pale and wan and aged, but still my own." She ceased speaking, and sat shuddering before him.

"A creature of your own imagination, my child. You are excited, and, I fear, all but very ill, and my own selfish folly has caused it."

"No, Hugh, indeed there was no imagination about it. For a moment we stood looking at each other, then the figure stretched out its arms towards me for an instant and vanished. As it did so I found strength to cry aloud; but I shall never forget it, never."

"You must forget it, Beatrice; you will be really ill if you allow such fancies to take possession of you."

"Could I not go to my own room and escape this dinner-party? I am so utterly nervous and weak."

"Certainly; remain here, and I will send the housekeeper to you. She will explain to Lady Atherling that you are too ill to appear."

He held her hands in his own for one moment, pressed them to his lips, and left her.

It was agreed among the guests assembled at Atherling that night that his lordship had never been the same since his bereavement. "Poor man! he certainly looks dreadfully," said a kind-hearted matron. "He

tried to exert himself, but I am sure he did not hear one word that was said."

A note was put into Beatrice's hands the following morning. "Beatrice, I cannot stand it," was what Hugh said. "I cannot stand it, and shall leave for town by the early train to-morrow. God be with you, my darling, my darling!"

With tearless eyes she read these words; then, fearing to lose the self-command for which she had been struggling all the morning with heavy heart, she made her way to the drawing-room.

Cynthia Trowbridge was at the piano singing. Mrs. Cynthia had the sweetest voice and the habit of singing the dearest old ballads! As Beatrice entered she sang, *des larmes dans la voix,*—

> "'Time doth thrust me from thine arms;
> Good-by, sweetheart, good-by.'"

"Great heavens, Beatrice! how like a ghost you look!" exclaimed her sister.

"You must not think of leaving us to-day," said Lady Atherling. "My husband left his adieux and wishes for a speedy recovery. He was called away suddenly to town."

"Thank you; you are very kind; but we must not stay longer. I am quite well again."

"You don't look it, sweet child," interrupted Mrs. Trowbridge. "A little fresh air will do you good. Come out with me; I have a grand plan to propose."

She drew Beatrice, nothing loath, through the door into the winter-garden. "I see it all, my dear," she said. "Don't contradict me; I am not to be deceived.

As to his lordship, the merest child would have guessed his secret. He went about here last night like Hamlet's father's ghost, and his anxiety for you written all over his face."

"Don't, please!" sighed Beatrice. "He has gone now, and there is an end of it; I shall never see him again," with a little heart-broken sob.

"Bow, wow, wow!" was Cynthia's unsentimental reply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ADIEU, MIGNONNE MA BELLE!

"She has two eyes so soft and brown.
Take care!
She gives a side-glance and looks down.
Beware! beware!
Trust her not, she is fooling thee!"

BEATRICE SUTHERLAND had never known the utter careless happiness which is supposed to be the characteristic of extreme youth. Her very childhood, passed in the company of an old and childless woman, had been merely calm and peaceful. Of a nature almost morbid, such trials as fell to her share fell with a crushing force. Under happier circumstances she would have been a gentle, loving, restful woman, with thoughts all given to those about her and to heaven; but now she had suddenly grown weary ere life's journey had well begun, and nothing could arouse her from the state of despondency into which she had fallen. Her sister was

annoyed, and finally alarmed. Ethelbert, obedient to a mandate from Mrs. Featherstone, who was wise enough to see that Beatrice might easily be driven too far, had returned to Berlin, and was fain to be contented with lengthy epistles from Mrs. Featherstone, which were penned without her sister's knowledge.

"Elizabeth, I think that I will go home," Beatrice said, one morning. "Aunt Amelia writes that she is not well; it does not seem right to leave her alone."

"She is never well according to her own account, though in what her great delicacy consists I'm sure I have never solved. What could you do in London at this time of the year?"

"I don't know, but I think that I might be of some use to her, and I am restless. Let me go, dear."

"Go by all means; and before you go, Beatrice, what about young Baskervyle?"

"Nothing about him that I know of."

"He is as true as steel, Beatrice; no man will ever love you better than he; and I heard the other day that Lord Atherling had been very ill. Rheumatism of the heart, or something of that kind. Mark my words, my dear, that man won't live long. People don't turn as deathly white as he does for nothing."

"Who told you that he was ill?" Beatrice murmured. "I don't believe it; he looked a great strong man. He *is* strong," she repeated, half angrily, trying, poor child, to convince herself of the truth of her own words.

"I forget who told me; it was in the papers, for that matter. You'll see I'm right; there is nothing more deceptive than all those diseases of the heart. You

must call on Lady Atherling when they come to town, Beatrice; she will be an excellent friend for you——" But Beatrice had escaped, and was on her knees by her bedside, in an agony of prayer.

"Oh, my God! save him, save him!" was the cry of her heart. No word passed her lips.

There indeed was a possibility which had not occurred to her, that she should never gaze with earthly eyes upon his face again. Never to touch his hand, nor hear his kind voice murmur her name, were wretched facts, to be borne as best they might. But that death should take him from her, making him one of the many mysterious spirits who inhabit that unknown somewhere, of whom we speak with bated breath only, in terms of respect as of some one far beyond our sphere, who can have no interest in our common weal, no part in our life's turmoil, no place save in the hearts of a desolate few! That she herself should go over to the great majority had seemed no unlikely thing to her, especially of late, so much nearer does death seem to the young than to the old; but that Hugh should be taken, Hugh, for whom the sun seemed to shine, the rain fall, the very earth move on its axis! It was impossible. Yet the terror was there. She must see him again, if only for a moment, look into his face, that she might know that what they had told her was a cruel lie.

The journey to London seemed all too long; there she might hope to see him, or at least hear of him. Parliament would meet ere long, and then he would be obliged to be in town. Her aunt greeted her with even more than usual coldness.

"Well, Beatrice, so you are come home again?"

Home! what a mockery the word was to the poor girl's ear!

"Yes, aunt; I have come to nurse you."

"Thank you, my dear, Keen is my best nurse; she understands me. Ralph Featherstone has not sent me in a bill for your board and lodging, which is rather surprising."

"He has been very kind," Beatrice said, flushing. "Elizabeth has sent you some woodcock, and hopes to see you in the spring. They have taken a house for the season."

"Oh! it's the first time that he has rushed into expenses of that kind."

"It will be no expense, Aunt Amelia; they are to have his sister's house. She is very ill, and ordered abroad for a year."

"Ill!" repeated Miss Sutherland, scornfully; she always resented anything like indisposition in others. "She's as well as you are, if not better,—great stout woman!—but I've no patience with these imaginary invalids. Tell Keen to unpack Miss Beatrice's trunks and order her a cup of tea. Unpack your own things? Nonsense! they would be all scattered over the place. You are deplorably untidy,—all foreigners are. There's your sister Elizabeth; I'll say that for her, she's beautifully neat. It's her only virtue, and she came honestly by it: her mother was the same. Ah, it's a pity she hadn't lived!"

As the death of the first Mrs. Sutherland was the indirect cause of Beatrice's appearance in this vale of tears, this could hardly be construed into a civil speech. "It was a great misfortune for poor Elizabeth to lose

her mother, surely the greatest loss a woman can sustain," the girl said, sadly.

"Hum! it depends on the mother," ejaculated Miss Sutherland.

Such taunts had not been rare; often and often Beatrice would have given her life to have had the power to deny all they implied.

"She's that cross and cranky, miss," said Keen, consolingly, as she followed Beatrice up-stairs to her room, "that there ain't no pleasing her; lie you down and I'll see to your things. Lord love you! it's a pleasure to do anything for the likes of you."

Keen had Irish blood in her veins,—a fact which, however, she indignantly denied,—and was inclined to be loquacious; moreover, Beatrice was a prime favorite.

"Lord love you! what if she do have her clothes about sometimes?" the old woman used to say; "ain't she as neat as a new pin about her own parson? I'd rather pick up after Miss Beatrice all the days of my life than have Miss Elizabeth a-buzzing about after me, a worretting of one's soul-case out of one, so I would."

"Keen, do you know is Mrs. Trowbridge in town?" asked Beatrice.

"Indeed an' she is, miss. I see'd her in a hansom cab myself not two days ago."

This was welcome news to Beatrice, and the following day found her in Mrs. Trowbridge's drawing-room. Cynthia flew into the room with arms extended.

"You delightful creature, how delighted I am to see you! With your aunt, of course? Dear me, how ill you are looking! Don't look at me, my dear, I am green, positively green; it is this disgusting place. Not

a soul in town, with the exception of that ridiculous creature Count Bothmar, and he is going to-morrow. It will be a relief to me. He ceased to be amusing once one got used to his funny English and funnier French. He is to be here directly to bid me adieu. It will be an affecting ceremony. I would not have had you miss it for anything."

"I am afraid that I can't 'assist at it,' as he himself would say," laughed Beatrice, "for I am to meet my aunt at Marshall & Snellgrove's."

"Ah! not too ill for shopping?"

"No; she is a little better to-day. I wish that she would let me go alone. I always know exactly what I want, and find no difficulty in buying it. But Aunt Amelia goes in, gets half of their entire stock in trade on the counter before her, and then walks off, saying that 'she will think of it.' There is not a tradesman with whom we deal that I dare look in the face."

"Why do you not order your dresses from Paris? More expensive?—not a bit of it. English people have no taste. However, you cannot go far wrong, as you never wear anything save black and white. Great heavens! there's the count! Must you really go, my dear? So sorry! By-bye."

Beatrice met the young Austrian on the stairs. He stopped to greet her, and in the same breath to make his adieux.

"I am so sorry to leave England," he said; "so very sorry." There was a tone of such sincerity in his voice that Beatrice looked at him in surprise. She was shocked to see how much he had changed in those few months, and for the first time the thought crossed her

mind that he might not be as indifferent as Mrs. Cynthia.

They shook hands cordially, Beatrice murmuring some commonplace expressions of regret at his departure, and saying,—

"Mrs. Trowbridge will be so glad for this opportunity to bid you farewell!"

> "'Félicité vaine,
> Qu'on ne peut saisir,
> Trop près de la peine
> Pour être un plaisir,'"

said the young fellow, sentimentally, in his queer French, which, despite his mournful looks, almost made Beatrice smile. "In one other year," he said, "I will come back."

Before six months had passed he lay dead on the battle-field of Sadowa, his white uniform bedabbled with dust and blood, his fair hair matted and damp, his handsome face fearfully changed and distorted by that agony of death. His watch and chain were taken from him as he lay dead on the field. From the chain there dangled a little gold locket containing a sweet baby face and the smallest possible bit of chestnut hair. When Mrs. Cynthia heard the news of his death she had tripped off to her writing-table, and penned the most tender of little notes in the purest of French, and written on the thickest and creamiest of note-paper. It would have brought tears to your eyes. She so thoroughly entered into a mother's feelings on the subject that the poor old Countess Bothmar, who had cried herself nearly blind over the death of her first-born

darling, was immensely moved, and wrote off, begging for a sight of the English mother (thus she was pleased to designate Mrs. Cynthia) of her boy. Mrs. Trowbridge accepted the invitation. It is just possible that her letter may have been written with a view thereto.

As the countess expected a motherly old lady of some sixty summers, her face must have been a sight for gods and men when Cynthia, attired in deep mourning out of respect for the family, and because it was becoming, tripped from the carriage. Mrs. Trowbridge was simply perfect; even the old countess was forced to acknowledge the fact, although she guessed something of the truth, while her husband raved about his son's beautiful English friend and entertained a higher opinion of the poor boy who was dead from that hour. Their good-nature did not win Cynthia's heart. The amusing description which she gave of the honest, simple German ways formed the subject for much hilarity among the men who took five o'clock tea in Mrs. Trowbridge's pretty drawing-room the following season.

"She'd serve you up in exactly the same way," said a brother officer of Jack's to a young fellow newly joined, who was inclined to fall a willing victim to Cynthia's "beaux yeux." "She was devoted to that Austrian fellow, and took to her bed with a 'migraine' for a whole day when she heard of his death, and now she spares neither his family, who loved him, nor the poor young fellow himself. I tell you what it is, my dear fellow, that young woman is the most arrant humbug I know." With which profound remark he strode off, regardless of his companion's defence of Mrs. Trowbridge.

Far away in Germany the old countess sat knitting by a window from which she could catch a glimpse of the church-tower beneath whose shadow her darling lay. His grave was very prettily planted over with the freshest of flowers, which were cared for tenderly by a little maiden whose dark eyes watered them with many tears. Mina von Bothmar had loved her cousin, and now that this grave was all that was left of him, was not ashamed to own that love. Was he conscious, I wonder, of those falling tears? Did he know, at last, the worth of that faithful little heart? Living, he had given gold for dross; dying, his last thoughts had been given to one who had no love for him; but some time, in the dim future, I can't help thinking that he will know the truth, and Mina's love and grief will not have been all in vain.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MADONNA-LIKE FACE.

"Oh! it was the world to me,
Life too, and more,
Catching that glimpse of thee,
Passing thy door.
Faint as an autumn leaf,
Trembling to part,
So in that moment, brief,
Trembled my heart."

"KING'S GIFT, February 9th.

"DEAR THEO,—I fully approve your plan of a school for young women, but even allowing that the work on which you are engaged is likely to be more successful than your first literary venture, it would be impossible for you to start anything of the kind unless you could rely upon a certainty in the way of income. Any outside help, I fear, is almost beyond the verge of possibility. A school of philosophy for young women of the lower classes would be an enterprise which would awaken in the English mind visions of coming disaster. Moreover, you will have strong clerical influence against you. You tell me that you propose receiving twelve girls, none of them under the age of ten or over the age of fourteen; they are to remain with you until the age of nineteen, and fit themselves for some business, or, should they display any particular talent, some profession. They are to bind themselves to remain at the

school for this number of years; to promise implicit obedience to the rules and regulations of the establishment. One is that no girl should absent herself from the school on any pretext whatsoever, unless on account of the illness or death of some near relation. This is a most excellent rule, but one which will cause you the most trouble. The girl's family will interfere, saying that 'the young woman is wanted at home;' the girl herself, anxious for change, like all young persons, will experience a sudden and unreasonable longing to return to the bosom of her family, thirsting perhaps for her native element of dirt and idleness. The clergyman of the parish will interfere on the ground that the young woman is receiving no religious instruction. In fact, difficulties will beset you on every side. 'Whatever is is right' in the eyes of nine-tenths of the British public, who abhor change; and your success will therefore entirely depend upon the extent of your influence over your scholars. To gain that influence you will need money. I know that you shrink from the suggestion, but you must allow that in worldly wisdom I am your superior, and I assure you that the parents must be bribed. Promise, therefore, to each girl who remains with you the allotted time, to present her with one hundred pounds, to be by her disposed of as she may see fit. The parents may not recognize the blessings of a comfortable home or the advantage of a good education, but hard cash will appeal to them, and by these means you will have induced them to throw their weight into your side of the scales.

"To meet this expense and others, I will gladly subscribe five thousand pounds. Hitherto Ida has had

the dispensing of the charities. I have lately looked into some of them and find them grossly mismanaged. I have therefore limited her donations, and am thus enabled to forward your scheme. I may as well tell you that this sum had been originally set apart for your use; you need have no scruples as to accepting it during my lifetime, and putting it to some use. I should not offer it did I not think well of your undertaking; but your proposed system of education is so excellent that I anticipate great and good results. What you say as to the necessity of impressing on young women of that class, indeed of every class, a sense of their own value as individuals, and a strong feeling of self-respect, is most true. The importance of housekeeping and culinary knowledge cannot be exaggerated, as you say. Your proposed lectures on logic may as well be abandoned first as last; you will never make women logical. Meet me, my dear, if possible, at the exhibition of paintings by modern artists, about to be opened in Pall Mall. I hear that there are two or three excellent pictures among an immensity of trash. Colman has a new picture which he is anxious I should see, one on which he has been engaged for some years. I shall arrive in town on Thursday; Saturday is the private view. You must meet me at the gallery. I will make arrangements with Colman, who will act as cicerone until my arrival. I have an appointment with the premier, and may be delayed. Parliament will perhaps be summoned very shortly; we shall therefore meet ere long more frequently.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ATHERLING."

Theodora needed no second bidding, and the following Saturday found her in the gallery looking about rather eagerly for Mr. Colman, with whom she was but slightly acquainted. It was not long ere he caught sight of her, and came up, saying,—

"Now, Mrs. Fanshawe, before your cousin arrives come and tell me the truth about my picture. I am satisfied and dissatisfied, pleased and anxious, hot and cold, all at once."

Theo laughed at his naïve manner, and traversed the room with him at once, until they stood before a large picture. It was certainly a striking picture, though the persons represented had looked out from many another canvas. No painter had perhaps chosen the calm period of their stormy lives as the moment in which to depict them. The picture was called "The Garden of Helen and Clytemnestra." In the foreground stood Helen, divinely tall and most divinely fair, —great sad eyes, in which lurked a dim foreboding of the future; a half smile parting lips which might have belonged to the Mother of Love herself. Her sister reclined at full length in the background—not so beautiful as Helen, whose glorious tints shamed the paler hues of Clytemnestra. She lay, lithe, graceful, snake-like, with eyes which gloomed with a strange power, a mouth which bespoke indomitable power and will. She was attired in gorgeous colors, in contrast to Helen's pale white garments.

"You have done wonders," said Theodora at length, in tones full of hearty admiration; "she is perfect."

"Ah! you admire my Helen?"

"Yes; but I was not thinking of her for the moment,

but of Clytemnestra, who is perfect. Am I right in supposing that she has caused you far more anxiety than the daughter of the gods?"

"Yes; still my admiration is all given to Helen. As a character, too, she is far more interesting."

"And why?"

"Well, her beauty, and all the trouble she caused, all the misery which she endured."

"And in what did the misery consist? Believe me, Mrs. Helen is a young woman upon whom much useless sympathy has been wasted. There are occasions when the only redeeming thing which a woman can do is to die. Such a moment came to Helen when Menelaus entered Troy in triumph. It was not his wife whom he should have found, but the dead mistress of Paris. Death was the only thing which would have preserved her dignity. It was not in her to be great. One can picture her living to a good old age, the most virtuous of Spartan mothers and the terror of all who deviated from the strict line of propriety. Clytemnestra was at least true to her wickedness; whereas Helen was true to nothing and no one. Clytemnestra slew with unsparing hand those who stood between her and the man whom she loved, paid the penalty, and was slain in her turn. How seriously you are listening to my nonsense! Oh! here is my cousin. I am glad to see you, Hugh; come and look at Mr. Colman's beautiful picture."

"Which would have been much more worthy of your inspection could the artist have had the benefit of Mrs. Fanshawe's advice before it was too late," said Mr. Colman, smiling.

"If you talk in that style I shall think that you are

laughing at me, and cease all criticism. Hugh, I maintain that Helen is too serious, too full of soul. Beautiful as she is, I give the palm to Clytemnestra."

"You have already made a convert of me," laughed the artist, "and will doubtless convince his lordship. I see a patron of mine in the dim distance. I must bring him up to look at the slave, that she may be sold for much gold. Do not criticise in his hearing."

He returned presently, in a great state of excitement.

"Eureka! Congratulate me, Mrs. Fanshawe."

"With all the pleasure in life, if you'll tell me on what grounds. Is the patron inclined to patronize?"

"I forgot to ascertain; but what I have found is more to me than the filthy lucre of the Dives. I have discovered a Madonna-like face for which I have sought with tears. Follow me, and I will take you to where she stands, unconscious of her divinity."

They followed, Theo eagerly, Hugh indifferently.

"There she is, standing before that picture of Ruth gleaning,—the lady in black."

Theo looked.

"What a sad face!" she exclaimed. "Look, Hugh."

He turned suddenly; a great change came over his face,—a quick flush of delight, which, vanishing, left him pale with emotion. He stepped quickly forward, and murmured a few words of greeting to Beatrice, for she it was. Beatrice looked at him with such anxious scrutiny that he smiled.

"Are you so much surprised by my sudden appearance that you have no word for me?"

"I am surprised," she said, becoming aware that his hand still clasped her own, and hastily withdrawing it.

"I am surprised and relieved to see you looking much as usual; they told me you had been ill."

"Oh! that was nothing. I hoped that you would not hear of it. I would have written, but you had forbidden me."

"It was better not," she said, softly, "though I have been very unhappy."

"You are not here alone?"

"No; with Mrs. Trowbridge. She left me this moment to speak to some friends."

"Let me introduce you to my cousin, Mrs. Fanshawe. Theodora, this is Miss Sutherland."

Theodora gazed with some curiosity into the sweet face. This, then, was the girl of whom Hugh had spoken with such enthusiastic admiration, and whom Ethelbert had loved so well. She smiled kindly down upon her and said,—

"Will you put yourself under my chaperonage, Miss Sutherland? The best picture here is just opposite; this gentleman is the artist."

Ere Beatrice could explain that she was with a party, Mrs. Trowbridge joined them.

"Lord Atherling! what a delightful surprise," she exclaimed; "and Theodora, my dear friend! such an age since we have met,—you are so seldom in town. Are you never coming back to us again?"

"If by *us* you mean society, I think not. Society and I have mutually abandoned each other, though I find that I see as much of the few people I call friends as though I were in town," answered Theo, fixing her gray eyes on Cynthia's face, without noticing her outstretched hand. "Miss Sutherland, will you let me

take you to see the picture I was mentioning?" She moved away, followed by Beatrice and Mr. Colman.

"You must come and see me," she said to the former. "I have the dearest little home; it is but two hours' ride in the train from this detestable London, but as far removed as pole from pole from its unrest. I will not call upon you, for I know something of your aunt, which something leads me to believe that I hang too much, like Mohammed's coffin, 'twixt the heaven called good society, into which only the deserving enter, and the earth, inhabited by those beyond the pale, to be a desirable acquaintance; perhaps, however, she may not object to your coming to me."

Beatrice murmured something about "being very happy," and stood before Mr. Colman's picture, without taking in a single detail of its beauty.

"Mr. Colman is contemplating a picture of the Madonna," said Theo, presently, in answer to an appealing look from that gentleman. "Would you object to giving him a sitting, Miss Sutherland? I would meet you at the studio."

Beatrice expressed her willingness, and the following Wednesday was appointed for the first sitting.

Lord Atherling conducted Mrs. Trowbridge and Beatrice to their carriage. He held Beatrice's hand in his own for a moment, but no words passed between them.

It was well that Theodora was too occupied with her plans for a school to notice Lord Atherling's evident abstraction; she talked it over with immense enthusiasm. Hugh appeared to listen, but at last, when directly appealed to, was obliged to acknowledge that

he did not quite understand. Theo contented herself with giving him a circular, which accurately described the whole system.

"Now, Theo," said Hugh, "are you coming to take tea with me? I amused myself last year by fitting up three or four rooms of an old house which I own in Queen's Square; they are very pretty. When I am in town I am so pestered with beggars for office or money, or what not, that I hide my head in that wilderness, where I am known as simple Mr. Hugo. When Ida is here I appear at the house in Eaton Square; during her absence I shut myself up in my three rooms, where I am as safe from intrusion as Robinson Crusoe himself. Colman will join us, and I shall exact an oath of secrecy from you both."

Theo excused herself on the ground that she must return to Tetherby before dark.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PORTRAIT.

"Away! it is a weary lot
To waste love's song where love is not;
But do not thou, fond boy, complain.
Alas! to some 'tis bitterer far
To love and feel how loved they are!"

WEDNESDAY morning found Beatrice and Theodora seated in Mr. Colman's studio, while he painted rapidly and with evident delight.

"Miss Sutherland, on this picture I shall stake my reputation. I am going against all recognized laws, against all precedent; but with you as a model I expect to triumph. A little more to the right, please, the hands clasped, so; now, for your life, don't move just for one minute! Thanks! I am tiring you, I fear."

No, Beatrice was not tired. When she rose to leave Mr. Colman, with a look of penitence which was visible, begged for one more sitting. "Only one more," he said, piteously; "my picture depends on it; it is a great deal to ask."

"I will be happy," Beatrice said, smiling. "Mrs. Fanshawe is the person most to be consulted; her time is precious, whereas I am the laziest of women, and will be glad to be of service to any one."

"I shall be very busy this week, but Thursday of next week, if that will suit, I am at liberty," said

Theodora, "and may be obliged to come to town on business."

"That is very good of you; another hour or so will do it," said Mr. Colman, as he bowed them out.

"I have my cousin's brougham here, Miss Sutherland; where can I take you?"

"But I shall be taking you out of your way," objected Beatrice.

"No; I am spending the night in town with my mother. I have something to say to you, if you do not mind."

Beatrice complied, curious and half afraid.

"I want to tell you," said Theo, going as usual to the root of the matter at once, "that my brother is expected home this evening. I shall see him, and as I have some influence with him I can perhaps persuade him that his presence will be painful to you. From all that I have heard, and I have naturally heard a good deal," she added, with a smile, "they bullied you fearfully between them last autumn. If you would prefer not seeing Bertie, he loves you a great deal too well to cause you pain."

"I would like to see him, Mrs. Fanshawe, if he would come to me as a friend, and forget all the past."

"Ah, my dear, I'm afraid that is impossible! Why can you not love him? Is it that you do not love him well enough? To me Ethelbert is so thoroughly lovable, so unselfish, so true. Ah, my child, there are few men of whom one can say as much after a lifetime spent in their society. It is not that he is my brother, but Bertie is the one man of my acquaintance whom I can really recommend as a husband. Dear Beatrice, if

you think that time will make any change in your feelings, give him the chance, please, for your own sake, no less than for his."

Beatrice looked at the earnest face so near her own, softened and beautified with the eagerness with which she was pleading her brother's cause, and felt strangely drawn towards it. Something, she knew not what, made it impossible for her to put Theo off with vague phrases such as she had made use of when questioned by her sister or aunt. It was impossible to equivocate with those gray eyes looking full into her own.

"I will tell you the truth," she said. "I cannot love your brother, for all the love in my heart is given to another man. When I gave him that half-promise at Featherstone I did not know what I was doing. I had not met that other then, and when I knew my own heart I told Ethelbert that I could never be his wife. He could not understand how it was that I had changed, and I could not explain to him. Oh, Mrs. Fanshawe, I am very unhappy!"

"My poor child!" said Theo, tenderly. "Can I help you?"

"No; there is no help for me in this world. You will not tell Ethelbert the truth? There is a reason why he must not know."

"No, dear; not without your consent. You must persuade your aunt to let you come to me. I see that you are ill and nervous. Write to me now and again, if it will be any comfort to you."

Beatrice promised, and as the carriage stopped at her aunt's door she leaned forward and pressed a kiss on Theo's lips, murmuring,—

"You have been very good to me, very good. I am so grateful to you for understanding; so few people do."

"I have suffered myself, Beatrice; that is the reason why I understand."

Theo drove off, very grave and thoughtful.

"Poor little thing!" she said to herself. "Poor little soul! how is she to fight the battle of life, so heavily burdened?"

The following morning she spoke seriously to Ethelbert, who, after a good deal of persuasion, promised to comply with his sister's request of not intruding upon Beatrice until he was better able to judge of her feelings.

"She does not forbid me the house, I suppose?" he asked.

Theo begged that he would not go often.

"I will not go at all, then, until she asks me," he said, angrily.

The result of this determination was that he made his way to Mrs. Trowbridge's the following day, in the vain hope that Beatrice might be there. Mrs. Cynthia was in no very amiable mood. Money was becoming very scarce. Jack had already suggested more than once that Windsor would be a less expensive place of residence than London.

"You would have no occasion to dress so much, and you'll see a great deal more of me," he said, in his stupid way.

"Yes, darling," answered his wife; "it would be delightful on that account; but it will never do to leave town,—all our friends will forget us, and we will sink into mere nobodies."

Ever since that visit to Featherstone Cynthia had been revolving a plan in her mind. Lord Atherling was a man whose influence was almost unbounded in official circles. Could she once put him under obligations to herself, she could work upon it to the extent of getting some government appointment for Jack. The premier's private secretary was about to resign. Why should not Lord Atherling, his most intimate friend, propose Jack as his successor? Acting on this pleasing conceit, she penned a short note, asking Hugh to call, and received him with her brightest smiles, and unfolded her plans with a good deal of *finesse.* The proposition was such a preposterous one, for a moment Hugh could not believe he had heard aright. When, however, the truth dawned upon him, he explained that "the position was one that required a person of the highest qualifications,—supreme *savoir faire,* great judgment, and the most perfect discretion."

"I could not possibly recommend your husband," he said; "he has no knowledge of diplomacy whatsoever. Were he appointed he could not keep the situation. I am very sorry. I would have been glad to do anything for Trowbridge or yourself. If you but knew what was expected from a man in that position, you would be the first to acknowledge his inability to fill it."

Cynthia was intensely disappointed and equally annoyed. She was careful, however, not to allow either to appear, and wise enough to know that all her blandishments were thrown away on Hugh. "I will let him know that I can be of use to him, however," she thought.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" she said, smiling,

looking up into his face when he was about to go. "Beatrice will be here presently. I told her to come to me this afternoon, knowing that you would be glad to meet her."

"I am very busy," he answered, stiffly. "Much as I regret missing Miss Sutherland, it is impossible for me to remain longer. I am sorry that I cannot oblige you in the matter of the secretaryship." With which he took his departure.

Not ten minutes later Ethelbert arrived, and found Mrs. Cynthia, as I said before, in no pleasant frame of mind. Her face, however, was wreathed in smiles as she greeted him.

"So delighted to see you back, and back for good, I hope. You expect to remain some time in England? Tell me, are your rooms at the Foreign Office really so lovely? Jack raves of them. You shall ask me to five o'clock tea, Ethelbert, and I will bring Beatrice."

"She won't come," Bertie said, gloomily. "I am an unlucky fellow, Cynthia. She is the only woman I ever cared for, and she must loathe me. She even got Theo to ask me not to come near her. I can't understand it," he continued, naïvely, "for she does not care for any other fellow."

"Are you so sure of that?" asked Cynthia, looking at him significantly. "I am not."

"What in thunder are you driving at, Cynthia? Just as if there could be anything between Beatrice and any other man without my knowing it. Besides, if she had cared for another fellow, she would not have accepted me as she did, or almost, at one time, and throw me over afterwards."

"It was after your cousin Hugh's arrival at Featherstone that she threw you over, was it not?" inquired Cynthia.

"Yes; though he tried his best to persuade her to think better of it."

Cynthia gave a low laugh. "Hugh did try his best, did he, my poor simple boy? Where were your eyes that you did not see that your cousin was so in love with her that he had eyes and ears for no one else? Even that foolish creature, Bothmar, saw it; and so did Lady Atherling, or I am much mistaken."

"It is not true," said Ethelbert. "If an angel from heaven told it to me I would not believe it!"

He was very pale as he spoke, and looked for a moment so like Theodora that Cynthia shrank from his eyes.

"My dear Ethelbert, I am really not in the habit of telling unnecessary lies, but I cannot bear to see you so deceived, and by one in whom you have such implicit faith. You need not believe me, of course. Unfortunately, that will not alter matters; time will show you the truth."

"Yes, time will show me the truth; and the truth is that my cousin is the truest-hearted man in the world, and Beatrice the purest and noblest woman. You suspect them wrongly, I am sure. Promise to breathe nothing of this to any one."

"Really, Ethelbert, you are too absurd! Of course I shall not mention it. In the mean time remember I am your friend."

She did not urge his remaining when he rose to depart, and when Beatrice arrived, a little later, rushed

into her friend's arms with the greatest appearance of delight.

A few days later Hugh received the following note from Theodora:

"FERN BANK.

"MY DEAR HUGH,—I promised to meet Miss Sutherland at Mr. Colman's studio on Thursday morning at eleven o'clock. I am expecting the arrival of two girls from a distant part of the country, and will therefore find it impossible to be there. She might feel awkward alone. Will you take my place for me? You are the only man in the world I would ask. But our dear mentor adds an air of intense respectability to everything. I had a line from Coutts', announcing that you had placed five thousand pounds there at my disposal. Dear old Hugh, it was good of you. The best thanks I can give you will be in the success of my undertaking, of which I am daily more and more assured.

"Your affectionate

"THEODORA."

Lord Atherling was at first amazed, but, on second thoughts, he decided that the *contretemps* was a fortunate one. Ever since that visit to Cynthia he had been haunted by the unpleasant impression which she had made upon him. He had never trusted her, and now felt that it had become necessary to warn Beatrice. He wrote a line to Theo, promising to obey her behest, and another to Ethelbert, reproaching him in that he had never made his appearance in Queen's Square.

How long those three days seemed which separated

him from that looked-for Thursday when he would see her face again, hear her voice, even perhaps manage to have one word in private with her! "It can't make much difference now," he whispered to himself; "if what Armstrong says be true, it cannot be for long."

CHAPTER XXI.

LOVE AND GRIEF.

Queen. . . . Think you not
It were convenient one of us should die?
Chastelard. Madam, your speech is harsh to understand!
Queen. Why, there could come no change then; one of us
Would never need to fear our love might turn
To the sad thing that it may grow to be!

LORD ATHERLING arrived rather earlier than was necessary at Mr. Colman's studio. He found that gentleman rapt in contemplation before his Madonna. The figure was only in outline, but the face was already striking in its likeness to Beatrice. Lord Atherling stood long before it.

"What do you think of it?" asked his friend.

"Excellent! The hair is a little too dark."

"That was intentional. The Blessed Virgin was a Jewess, and of a nation of dark people. I can never imagine her fair. The dark eyes and fair hair make Miss Sutherland's beauty very remarkable. I would like to paint her just as she looked the other day, and

Mrs. Fanshawe by her side. They made an exquisite picture."

"Yes, so I should suppose. Colman, the lower part of the face is altogether wrong. Miss Sutherland's chin does not recede in that manner, and has the prettiest little upward curve imaginable. I wish that I could paint,—I would show you what I mean in a moment."

"You are evidently well acquainted with the young lady," said the artist, smiling.

"I?—no, very slightly; but it is a face which I greatly admire. By the way, you will give me the refusal of this picture, I hope?" he added, trying to speak carelessly. "I feel that I was defrauded in the matter of 'Helen and Clytemnestra.'"

Mr. Colman began an explanation, but was interrupted by the entrance of Beatrice.

"Miss Sutherland, I am the bearer of my cousin's apologies. You must know that she has in hand a charity, which for the present occupies a good deal of her time. Some new pupil was expected to-day; she could not possibly leave, and wrote a line, asking me to meet you here and explain matters," said Lord Atherling, advancing eagerly towards her.

"You are very kind," murmured Beatrice. "I am sorry that you have had so much trouble. Shall I take off my bonnet, Mr. Colman?"

"If you will, kindly; and please, the same position, the hands clasped, so; thanks! I see now, my lord, what you refer to about the lower part of the face." And he began to work with an almost feverish haste, anxious to make the most of every available moment.

Two hours passed all too quickly, and Mr. Colman began a long speech, in which he made rather a vain attempt to express his gratitude. Lord Atherling followed Beatrice from the room.

"Would you ask the servant to call a cab for me?" she asked, turning to him as they reached the door.

"I have a brougham waiting which is at your disposal. I will not go with you," he said, looking down at her with sad eyes.

"I am so afraid of inconveniencing you."

For all answer Lord Atherling led her to the carriage, but he did not enter himself.

"Beatrice," he said, "can you trust me?"

Her only answer was a look full of reproach that he should deem such a question necessary.

"I have much to say to you. I do not wish Colman to see us drive off together. Will you go to my place in Queen's Square and await my coming? My name is unknown there."

Beatrice hesitated for a moment. "Yes," she said, finally, "I will go."

"The carriage is a hired one. The old housekeeper will let you in; ask for Mr. Hugo."

Lord Atherling gave directions to the coachman, and then returned to the studio, asking the man-servant to fetch a hansom. Ten minutes later he was driving in the direction of Queen's Square. He found Beatrice turning over the books which lined the walls of the library, which was one of the few furnished rooms of the house.

"Would the young lady have somethink to take, sir?" asked the housekeeper, who had followed him

up-stairs, a little curious to see how Mr. Hugo would greet his cousin, of whose probable advent he that morning had informed her. Her mind was put at rest by the cold manner in which he offered her his hand, and the very moderate pleasure which he expressed.

"There was a young gentleman inquiring for you this morning, sir. He came just before the young lady, but I didn't let him in because you hadn't given no orders, except about the young lady."

Hugh looked very grave over this information. "Beatrice," he said, as the old woman left the room, "you did not meet any one at the door, did you?"

"Not a creature; the whole square appeared to me deserted. I had no conception such a wilderness existed in London."

They talked long about Mrs. Trowbridge. Beatrice described the scene in the winter-garden at King's Gift, whereupon Hugh more than ever counselled prudence.

"I cannot quite trust her," he said. "My cousin Theodora is the truest and the most loyal of women. I feel sure that she would not have turned against her in the manner she has without some very good reason for it. Be careful, my darling; it is misery enough to know that I have brought nothing but unhappiness to you without bringing disgrace. I am afraid that allowing you to come here is an imprudence, but I felt that I must warn you, and the temptation was very, very great."

"But I see no harm in it," said Beatrice, looking up at him in perfect innocence. "It is unconventional, if you like, but where should I be safer than with you, Hugh?"

"Where, indeed!" he said, smiling. "Now I want to show you all my pretty things."

He began turning out drawer after drawer of art treasures which would have filled the heart of a virtuoso with envy. Beatrice looked and admired, praised his taste, and bloomed again, poor trampled little flower that she was, beneath the sunlight of his loving smiles. They fell at last to talking about King's Gift.

"When I watched you flitting about the rooms," Hugh said, "I used to think with a kind of rage how dear the old house would have been to me with Beatrice for its mistress. I can talk of all I suffered then, dear, for the joy of seeing you here is enough; it almost makes me forget the misery of it all. Ah! Beatrice, how can I live without you? It is not that you are not my wife, though that is sad enough, but that I cannot see you sometimes,—know that you still love me. I am half mad when I think that I have no hold on you, —that my love for you is selfish, and can never bring aught save misery. At such times I long to die, that I may not know when the time comes, as come it must, when you will forget the old love which has been so bitter, and give your heart to some man who can wear it proudly as his dearest possession. When that day comes, dear one, how mad I shall be with hopeless love and jealousy! You do not know the misery which I endured when you would look up at poor old Bertie in those early days at Featherstone, and laugh at his funny sayings. It used to drive me from the room in a perfect frenzy of insane jealousy. You will despise me, Beatrice, for this confession."

"I do not understand it, perhaps, it is so very foreign

to my nature. You need have no fear, Hugh; I love you far too well to change. Don't talk of dying, please; it sends a thrill of horror through me, and is the one misfortune which I cannot even contemplate. Surely, dear, even if our love be a crime, which I cannot think, that punishment would far exceed our deserts. If I can but see you now and again and tell you that I love you, I can still think life a gracious gift, and be, if not happy, at least contented."

"Do not tempt me so, my dearest; for God's sake do not tempt me! If you only knew what it is to see you once more, how your presence will haunt this room, with what different eyes I shall view it because you have been here! You are strong, Beatrice; it is all a vain boast of ours when we call ourselves the stronger vessel. Compare our lives to yours, how miserably weak we are! I have known women whose whole existence has been one long sacrifice, yet they never complained. You are strong, my darling; as you are strong be merciful."

"Of course, if you think there would be anything wrong in it," Beatrice said.

"It would be laying you open to scandal, child; the world is always ready to stone a woman. Look at Theo, the noblest, purest of women; because she refused to live with a man who is a perfect brute, what things they say of her. Theo can stand it. You, my poor little flower, would sink and fade under the world's cruel displeasure. Still, I cannot give you up quite; and, Beatrice, do not laugh at me. Should we meet, as of course we will this season at balls and parties, don't talk much to any one man, please."

Beatrice could not but smile. Had they been two happy young lovers, with a whole lifetime of married bliss before them, the opportunity to tease him just a little could not have been neglected. But remembering how much he suffered, the beseeching look touched her.

"I will be careful," she said. "You must trust me. And now I must go. Oh, dear, it is very hard!" She rose as she spoke and stood before him. For the first time he took her in his arms and kissed her trembling lips.

"God bless you, my darling!" he said, in a trembling voice. "I cannot bear to part from you. I shall have something to remind me of you soon. Colman has promised me the refusal of the Madonna. You can imagine I am not likely to refuse it."

Lord Atherling had ordered a carriage, which awaited them. It was agreed that they should stop in Berkeley Square, that Beatrice might walk home to Green Street. When the carriage stopped Hugh descended, and was about to help Beatrice to alight, when she shrank back into the corner of the carriage.

"Hugh," she cried, in a low voice. "Hugh, did you not see it,—the face that is so like mine? I could not have been mistaken this time. It looked out from the window of the coupé which passed us just as we stopped. You have no idea how dreadful it is to me. Why do I always see it when I am with you? It paralyzes me with terror. Please get in again, dear, and see me safely home; I am wretchedly nervous." Hugh complied, and left her at her aunt's door.

"Who was that who brought you home, Beatrice?" asked Miss Sutherland.

"It was Lord Atherling, Aunt Amelia; he was at the studio."

"Ah! He is Mrs. Fanshawe's cousin, is he not?"

"Yes," answered Beatrice, in a low voice, and made her escape, fearing that the next question would be, "Was Mrs. Fanshawe there?"

Lord Atherling drove down to the Carlton Club, ordered dinner, and then sat dreaming over Beatrice's every word and look during the short hour which they had passed together. On his return to Queen's Square he was surprised to find Ethelbert seated in a huge arm-chair, evidently awaiting his arrival, and still more so when his young kinsman greeted him with a ceremonious bow and requested a few minutes' conversation. He stood before his cousin, his eyes fixed searchingly upon him, and an indignant flush upon his boyish face. Ere he spoke Hugh guessed the errand which brought him, and his own face grew a trifle paler while he bowed his head in token that he would listen to what he might say.

"I was here this morning," Ethelbert said, in a harsh voice, very different from his usual ringing tones. "I was refused admittance, but the lady who arrived two or three minutes later was more fortunate. I only caught one glimpse of her face; it was enough. I watched and saw her enter at the door of this house, and I have come here to-night to tell Hugh Baskervyle that he is a scoundrel! You need not look at me like that; I repeat the word,—a scoundrel! A seducer of innocent girls, and a hypocrite at that, who, under the guise of much intense respectability, does these things,—who, under the guise of friendship, wins the love of his *friend's* be-

trothed. History repeats itself, truly. Your father served my uncle Eustace in the same way, and destroyed two lives by his treachery, as you have destroyed mine, and, what is a great deal worse, hers, for which may God's curse light upon you! An excellent mediator I chose! May I ask did you plead your own cause while I supposed you to be advancing my suit?"

"Ethelbert," said his cousin, very gravely, "I have heard you with some patience, I think. You have accused me of a crime of which I am perfectly innocent; a crime of which I have never been guilty in my life, and from which, please God, I would shrink with horror. I love Beatrice Sutherland so well that could I suppose it possible that any man could harbor such a suspicion against her, I would have died sooner than be the cause. I have loved her from the first moment I saw her; but before God, who made me, I never betrayed the fact to herself until I knew—from her own lips—that she would never be your wife. Until to-day I have seen her but once, and then in the presence of others, since we were all together at King's Gift. I did wrong in allowing her to expose herself to such insulting suspicions as you have dared utter; but you have been wronged in a measure, though God knows I would not willingly have wronged your father's son. My love for Beatrice is a bitter, bitter curse. Your hard words, my boy, cannot make our burden heavier than it is already. Had it been my own secret only, I would have opened my heart to you long since, for deceit is painful to me. You need not fear that I shall do her any wrong; and were I base

enough, it is not in my power, or in the power of any man, to sully her perfect purity."

While his cousin was speaking Ethelbert stood, his eyes fixed upon the ground, his face still hot with anger and pain. Hugh's words carried conviction with them; still his heart burned with a feeling of wrong.

"You have deceived me," he said, shortly, tears of rage and grief in his eyes; "you have deceived me cruelly. It is as well that we should not meet, and I will be obliged if you will discontinue the allowance which you have made me since my father's death. I don't want your money. Good-night." With these words he moved towards the door.

"I have not deserved this, Ethelbert," Hugh said, sternly; "your sense of wrong makes you unjust." For a moment the two men stood face to face. Wretched and angry as Ethelbert was, he could not but notice how white and wan and aged Hugh seemed, as he stood looking at him with sad eyes.

"Good-night," Ethelbert repeated, as he passed from the room and from the house, without once looking back.

CHAPTER XXII.

A MOTHER'S PRAYER.

"I love thee! It is understood,
Confessed. I do not shrink or start;
No blushes. All my body's blood
Has gone to greaten this poor heart,
That, loving, we may part."

E. B. BROWNING.

LORD ATHERLING was uncertain what course to take regarding Ethelbert; he at length decided that Theo was the best friend to whom he could appeal. It was impossible for him to leave town at that moment; the following morning, therefore, he wrote. It was a long letter, in which he gave her the history of his love for Beatrice, attempting no self-defence, though he told her of the deception that had been practised upon him by his wife, the letter concluding with these words:

"I have known for some time past that my life is very uncertain; in your hands, therefore, I leave my darling, trusting to your strong sense of justice, and your loving woman's heart, to do all that mortal can do to make her life such as I would wish it to be. It is a sacred trust, Theodora,—one not to be lightly undertaken. Can you think of her and act towards her as you would have towards my sister, had she been left alone in the world? Some dim foreboding tells me to write as I am now doing. Should Ethelbert win her

love, may no thought of me come between them! I should like to think that Beatrice's sweet presence would beautify the old house of King's Gift, and Beatrice's children make it what it never has yet been,—homelike. Ethelbert parted from me in anger, natural anger. Nevertheless I can still say God bless you both!"

This letter written, Hugh strolled down to his club, and sat listlessly turning over the morning papers.

"I beg pardon, my lord," said a servant at his elbow, "a lady would wish to speak with your lordship."

"A lady?" exclaimed Hugh. "What lady?" For a moment the thought that it might be Beatrice crossed his mind; but he abandoned the idea as preposterous. A small brougham was drawn up before the door. Hugh made his way to the carriage. Its only occupant, a woman dressed in deep mourning, leaned forward as he approached, and turned towards him a face so like to Beatrice that he remained staring at her, his hat in his hand. He made one or two ineffectual efforts to utter some words, but they died on his lips. At length she spoke, hurriedly, with a slight foreign accent. Again the tones of her voice were so painfully familiar that he could only stand in amazement.

"You must come with me," the lady said; "I have much to speak with you about which I may not say here." Then, seeing that he hesitated, she added, "You know Miss Sutherland?"

Hugh answered in the affirmative.

"I am her mother!" She opened the carriage-door as she spoke. Without a word he entered.

"Home!" she called to the coachman.

Up St. James Street and along Piccadilly they went, until the carriage stopped before the door of a house directly opposite that occupied by Beatrice and her aunt. Hugh, wondering, followed the lady in.

She was short and Beatrice was tall, and her face had in it a world of suffering. Save for this, Hugh might have fancied that Beatrice was before him.

When they entered the drawing-room, she stood clasping and unclasping her hands nervously.

"Will you be seated?" she said at length. "I must tell you of my life, and then you shall decide if I am worthy of your help, for you can help me. I was the daughter, the only child, of the Count Villani. We were poor; ah! very poor. I was but eighteen when he who afterwards became my husband came to Rome, where we were then living. He loved me, and I loved him as not many women are capable of loving. My father was glad. 'I am getting old,' he said. 'You will marry this good man, who will love you, and care for you all your life!' We were married. Ah! those were the happy days, before we came to this dreary country. He brought me here to his father's house. His father loved me; perhaps it was that which made his sister hate and distrust me. They feared that I would be more his daughter than they were. It was a weary winter, and ere my child was born my husband sickened of consumption. They told him that he must leave England; but he would not part from me in my hour of trial. When Beatrice (we called her Beatrice, in memory of my mother) was but two months old her father consented to leave England. He was dying. I did not know it. I thought once we had the Italian

skies over our heads, the Italian air blowing on to our brows, we would both be well again. I left my child; there my misery began. 'You cannot possibly take her,' they said. 'She is too young; you are not able to nurse her. Why take her away from us? We all love her.' So we two went away to Italy. At first for a few days, after the fatigue of the journey was over, he was better, and we made many plans that Italy should be our home, that we would bring our darling there, and be, oh! so happy. Alas! it was not to be. My husband died. I was very ill,—near death, they have told me,—and when I recovered I could remember nothing. My mind gave way, and I would wander about the house, searching, always searching, for my child, and crying for her, until—to quiet me—they told me she was dead. After I recovered from the insanity, which they had feared was incurable, I never spoke of either husband or child. They were both dead, I thought; and save for some treasured mementos, that blissful year of my life was as though it had never been. Ten years after my husband's death I consented to become the wife of my cousin, Count Villani. He was already an old man. But my father loved him; and so indeed did I, as a child loves its parents. Not even then did my father breathe a word of the truth; it was only on his death-bed that he told me. 'You thought the child dead,' he said, 'and had mourned it as such. Where was the good in undeceiving you? We were so poor that the little one was better off with its father's rich relations.' Better off without its mother's love and care and tenderness, my sweet Beatrice! No, a thousand times, no!" the poor

mother said, glancing across involuntarily towards the house opposite. "He begged me not to undeceive my husband, who was very jealous of my love, he reminded me. Ah, it was very cruel of him that my child would not know me, that her first smile was not for me! My name had never been breathed by her baby lips, and, surrounded by her father's family, there would be no place for me in her heart. My husband did not long survive my father. As soon as I found myself free I turned towards England,—a country for which I had little love, but the dearest spot on earth since my child is here. When you were at Featherstone last autumn, I was at the village inn. I feared to present myself boldly, for it was quite possible that Mrs. Featherstone would recognize me, even after all those years, and I shrank from meeting any of that family. I heard of your departure for King's Gift, and followed. All this time I had but once caught sight of my darling. You were all riding; something was wrong with her saddle. You dismounted to arrange it. Do you remember? I was hidden behind the curtain, watching you. I read your secret then and there, and inquired your name. They told me. I saw her afterwards at King's Gift; it was a dark autumn day, the last day of my daughter's stay in your house. I felt that I must see her; I even felt brave enough to make myself known to her. The park and grounds were deserted. Unobserved I made my way to the winter-garden, and from there to the terrace. I feared to pass the windows, which all opened down to the ground. While I was hesitating the ruddy light of a fire caught my eyes; I crept forward and peered through the win-

dow. Seated before the fire was Beatrice. You were by her side. I could even overhear something of your conversation. The rest you know. My child approached the window; spell-bound I stood and gazed at her, as the dead might gaze on the living. I alarmed her, and no wonder; her cry brought me to myself. Swiftly and noiselessly as I came I stole away. The following morning you left for London, whither I followed you. Since then I have been very ill. I came to this house because of its proximity to my sister-in-law's. I had learned that with her Beatrice had made her home. I saw her with you yesterday; that is why I have sought this interview."

She ceased speaking, and stopped the restless walk up and down the room, which until this moment had been uninterrupted. Finding that he kept silence, she continued:

"They tell me that you are a good man, one whom all men respect and trust. You have a wife who is also admirable, of whom you may well be proud; you have great riches, a high position, a name which promises to be famous,—all this is yours. I have only my child, while she has only her good name. Most women, mothers, would demand of you that you should respect that good name. I, who have forfeited the right to demand, appeal to you, by the love which you bore your own mother, to spare my child. Do not add to my bitter self-reproach; do not make me feel that she has been lost,—lost, because the mother who should have been her guard, her guide, abandoned her!"

She stood before him as she spoke, her large eyes fixed upon him, full of unshed tears, her hands clasped,

her sweet voice trembling with suppressed emotion. A harder man than Hugh would have found it difficult to ignore that prayer. His eyes fell beneath hers, while he spoke slowly, with the deepest earnestness.

"Madame," he said, "I will give you my word as an Englishman and a gentleman that your will in this matter shall be law to me. God knows that I have done your daughter no intentional wrong. It is hard to part from her forever. Ah, how hard! You are a good woman; take her from those heartless women who surround her, and let your love make amends for all. She is all that you can desire. You are a stranger here; is there no service which is in my power to perform? You do not know what it would be to me could I serve her or hers in any way."

The Italian lady murmured her thanks, without, however, accepting his offer. It was arranged between them that no time should be lost before the meeting took place between the mother and daughter.

"I will take her to Italy," the countess said. "It will be better so, will it not?"

Hugh could not answer, so merely bowed his head; he could not but remember that the reunion with Beatrice, to which she was looking forward with such joy, would separate him forever from the woman he so well loved. It was very difficult for him to enter heartily into her plans for the future, in which he, alas, could have no part and parcel. What was the future to him now, bereft of Beatrice?

"I suppose I may write one word of farewell," he said. "May I address the letter to you?"

"Yes; write. I am so sorry, so very sorry!"

"Thanks! Good-by." He pressed his lips to her hand and left the room.

The Countess Villani watched him depart with a heavy heart, for was not his sorrow but the foreshadowing of a great grief, from which not even her love could save her child?

As to Hugh, he walked off towards Queen's Square, more lonely, more hopeless than he had ever been; he thought of his blessings as enumerated by the countess, and laughed bitterly, to the wonder of the passers-by. Arrived in Queen's Square, he reopened his letter to Theo, and told her of the strange interview, begging her to see the Countess Villani as soon as possible, and soften the shock of the meeting between the mother and child. He took the letter out himself and posted it; then he returned to his room and drew his desk towards him, intending to write that last farewell to Beatrice.

"I cannot do it," he groaned. The proud head sank on his arms, while his whole frame shook with heart-broken sobs, the hopeless, tearless sobs of a strong man brought low.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEAD IN THE LIGHT OF THE DAWNING DAY.

"Ah! pangs of hearts torn asunder, passionate regrets, cruel, cruel partings! Shall you not end one day, ere many years, when the tears shall be wiped from all eyes, and there shall be neither sorrow nor pain?"

W. M. THACKERAY.

"I CAN'T forgive the treachery of the thing," Ethelbert said to his sister. He was walking up and down the drawing-room, scattering the chintz chairs to right and left.

"I know, dear; Hugh himself acknowledged that your anger is natural; but I can see that he is dreadfully unhappy. Think of it, Bertie; he has only us. Married to a woman like that, who has tricked and outwitted him in a manner which the lowest and most degraded woman might well scorn. Think of his loneliness, Bertie, if we forsake him. I will do all in my power to separate him from Beatrice; he knows that, you may be sure. If her own mother can trust him, surely you may. He must be dreadfully unhappy. Think of the old days, Bertie, and go to him. We will bear it all together as best we may."

"You are not so forgiving, Theo, when you are wronged," her brother said.

"No, dear; forgiveness in that case would have been worse than useless. There was no material to work

upon; no loving heart to be touched by kindness and forgiveness. Ethelbert, I think that Hugh has behaved well. I do not suppose that he could help loving her, and in her place I am afraid that I should have been tempted, very strongly tempted, to be less discreet than she has been."

Ethelbert looked at his sister in amazement. With all Theo's vagaries it had never occurred to him to doubt her discretion.

"If I were to love a man as she loves Hugh, and such a man, I don't think that the world would be able to separate us."

"Then, my dear, it is to be hoped that you'll remain heart-whole until Fanshawe is gathered to his fathers. I am not alarmed about you, madam. You'll never care enough for any man to do—well, to do anything foolish."

"I dare say not, Bertie. But, Bertie, what about Hugh? Will you go to him and 'make it up,' as the children say?"

Ethelbert demurred, but after a good deal of persuasion consented to be the bearer of a letter to Hugh, which Theo quickly penned.

He found Hugh seated before his bedroom fire. His face was very pale, but it flushed with glad surprise when Ethelbert entered the room and came towards him with outstretched hand, saying,—

"Hugh, can you forget what I said the other day? I dare say you meant truly by me all through. I have brought you a letter from Theo. She will help you if possible."

"Thank God, my boy! Another week and it might

have been too late. I am ill, and the events of the two last days have told upon me."

Ethelbert looked at his cousin now for the first time, and was dumb, a great fear at his heart. Hugh looked like one who had passed through a severe illness.

"I have been trying to write to her, Ethelbert; for although I have been all night and all day nearly over it, I can find no words in which to bid her farewell. Bertie, now that I think of it, I was with Middleton this morning, and had a codicil added to my will. I am leaving you the ten thousand in the India bank; it is for her use."

"All right, old fellow; cheer up, you'll bury me yet, please God." Then dropping his voice, and turning his face that his cousin might not see the effort which it cost him, Ethelbert Baskervyle did the bravest, most unselfish thing a man could do. "Hugh," he said, "would you like to see her? I can manage it for you, I think."

Hugh was silent; a struggle was going on between his love and his generosity. Love conquered, as love will do in this world of ours. "It will not be for long," he said to himself, as he had once said before; then aloud,—

"Ethelbert, you shame my selfishness. How can I ask you to make such a sacrifice for me?"

"It is for her sake, too," said Ethelbert. "I think that she should see you; it will make the parting less hard. I will go now and bring her to you; it is better to get it over."

He left the room ere Lord Atherling could answer, and running down-stairs without allowing himself to

think, jumped into the coupé, ordering the coachman to drive to Green Street.

"Yes," the page said, "Miss Beatrice was at home. Miss Sutherland was ill, but Miss Beatrice would see Mr. Baskervyle."

Beatrice came slowly into the room and held out her hand with a weary smile. Bertie took it in both his own.

"You have often asked me, Beatrice," he said, trying to smile, "why I could not be your brother and love you only as I love Theo. I used to say that it was impossible; but now I want to play the part of a brother for an hour or two. I know now, dear, why you could not love me. I know that you love my cousin; he has promised some one—some one to whom you are very dear—that he will part from you. It is but just that he should see you himself, and I am come to-day to bring you to him. Will you come with me?"

"Would it not be better that he should come here?"

"He is not able to do so. I am afraid that he is not well."

Beatrice gave a low cry.

"Ethelbert, this is the fear which has haunted me; for weeks past this terror has been with me night and day. I have seen death in his face at times, and have smiled when I could have cried out in my bitter pain. Take me to him, take me to him! what do I care for the world? This is no time to think of those things."

She seized his arm as she spoke, looking up at him with wild, imploring eyes. Beatrice, usually so thoughtful about others, forgot completely for the moment how

sad must be the sight of her love and grief to him. Every thought and feeling was swallowed up in that one agonizing fear.

"I cannot take you until you are more calm," Ethelbert said.

Beatrice sat down, trying vainly, poor child, to appear self-possessed, her little hands working nervously, her sweet lips trembling.

"Go now," he said; "dress yourself warmly,—it is cold and damp. If they ask you where you are going, say to my mother's, in Queen Street."

Beatrice returned presently and followed him to the carriage. The day was chill and rainy. Oxford Street teemed with mud-bespattered vehicles and busy passengers; already the gas was lit in many of the shops; the tired clerks were plodding their weary way homeward; the beggars, less affected by the weather than any one, being so accustomed to misery as not to notice a little rain and cold more or less, strolled along or held out their hands, blue with cold, to the passers-by. As they left the house, Bertie had inquired what excuse she had made for her departure. "No one saw me," Beatrice had answered, and then the silence between the quondam lovers had been unbroken until the carriage drew up before the house in Queen's Square.

"Stay here; I will call him," Ethelbert said, as he opened the drawing-room door and passed on into the bedroom beyond. A moment later he appeared on the threshold; he was very pale,—a great terror in his eyes. "I am afraid that he has fainted, Beatrice; what can I do?"

Beatrice flew past him, and the next moment was kneeling by Hugh's side, calling upon him in tones of passionate supplication to speak but one word. He lay on the sofa before a bright fire, unconscious; save for a slight twitching of the eyelids, to all appearance dead. With a low cry, "Too late! too late!" Beatrice sank down upon the floor.

She did not move when, a few minutes later, Ethelbert entered with a young doctor, whom he had fetched in hot haste, and who stood by the side of the sofa looking down upon the patient with a very grave face. He produced a small bottle of laudanum.

"I will give him a few drops; it is, as you supposed, heart-disease. Has this ever occurred before?"

Ethelbert could only shake his head helplessly.

"Do you know who his physician may be? Not knowing the present stage of the disease, I find it very difficult——"

"I think he is a man named Armstrong, but I don't know the address."

The young doctor looked at him in surprise. What a depth of ignorance was this! Not to know Armstrong, the great Armstrong! He suppressed an inclination to smile and furnished the address. Ethelbert in another moment was driving rapidly through the streets towards the West End.

He found the great man at dinner. He came soon enough when he heard who required him. Ethelbert hurried him into the carriage, and began explaining the state that they had found Lord Atherling in, and what had been done.

"Ah," the doctor said, sadly, "I have feared this,

though I never dreamed it would come so soon. I warned him, poor fellow! I warned him that unless he gave up work it could not last long. Ah, he will be a great loss to the country, a very great loss!"

These remarks, notwithstanding their complimentary nature, half maddened Ethelbert.

"Do you mean to say that there is no hope?" he asked, with a groan.

Dr. Armstrong looked at him in surprise. "I can only say, my dear sir, that while there is life there is hope; but his lordship, judging from your account, is suffering from angina pectoris,—a form of heart-disease which is very alarming. You say that this young man —what did you say the name was?—Barry?—Larry? I don't know him—administered laudanum? Very right, very correct, and hot applications to the extremities. Nothing could be better under the circumstances. Ah, it's a sad thing, a very sad thing! A very valuable life, Mr. Baskervyle. Who succeeds him, pray?"

"I do," answered Ethelbert, shortly.

"Ah, true, true; I had forgotten," said the doctor, rubbing his hands slowly together. "I attended your lamented father at one time," he added. It was a fact which up to that time he had forgotten as not worth remembering; but the father of an earl was no despicable patient.

Ethelbert resisted an almost overwhelming impulse to open the carriage-door and thrust him out; but this being impossible, was obliged to content himself with cursing the coachman for not going faster.

Dr. Armstrong entered the room slowly, with so funereal a face that Beatrice, who had looked up with

a ray of hope in her heart, sank down again in an agony of despair. The two doctors talked together in whispers, while Ethelbert strove vainly to induce Beatrice to leave the room.

"My dear Lady Atherling, allow me to beg of you to listen to Mr. Baskervyle," said Dr. Armstrong, coming forward officiously.

"Lady Atherling is not in town; this is my sister," said Bertie, shortly.

"A thousand pardons!" murmured the physician. He left the room presently, followed by Dr. Barry. The two men looked at each other. "He may last a few hours," said the elder man. "That young fellow there will be an earl before morning."

"An earl!" repeated Dr. Barry, looking up at him in a dazed sort of way.

"Yes, to be sure; he's his lordship's heir."

"Whose heir?"

"Lord Atherling's. Do you mean to tell me that you were not aware that you had been called in to attend Lord Atherling?"

"God bless my soul, no! The old woman downstairs spoke of him as Mr. Hugo."

"Ah! Very possibly he is here incognito. One of the freaks of genius, for his lordship was a genius in a political point of view."

What a political genius might be he did not explain.

"It is a very great responsibility. I should feel more satisfied if Dr. Hunt could be called in. I think that I may venture to send for him without consulting Mr. Baskervyle. The carriage is at the door, if you will be the bearer of my message. It is already ten o'clock;

you will probably find him in. Let me see; you might stop on your way in Eaton Square, and break the news to the household. Ascertain Lady Atherling's address, that she may be telegraphed for the first thing in the morning. Should any change take place I think that I shall be equal to the emergency," he added, with an air of conscious superiority.

Perhaps Dr. Barry did not quite appreciate being made a mere messenger of, but the honor and glory of being associated in a case with two such men as Drs. Armstrong and Hunt consoled him, and he drove off with a sense of his own importance.

The solemn butler in Eaton Square eyed him rather suspiciously, but forgot everything in his surprise and dismay when he heard the tidings of which he was the bearer.

"Her ladyship was at 'Eating,'" he said. "He would never forgive himself if the news were not communicated to her immediately. He would take his lordship's 'cowpy' and drive down himself."

Dr. Barry applauded his resolution, and drove on to Dr. Hunt's.

Two hours had passed: still there was no sound in the chamber of death, save the ticking of the clock, and now and again a low sob which broke from Ethelbert. How often during that midnight watch he thought of the hard words which he had spoken, the bitter thoughts which he had harbored against his cousin! Now he forgot his wrongs, and thought only of the thousand acts of kindness. He thought of the old Eton days, when Hugh, a fifth-form boy,—a great and glorious creature, in his eyes at least,—had deigned to protect

him, and preferred his society to that of any other; of his sympathy and encouragement when he was a young man; of the innumerable occasions on which Hugh had done all that influence and money could do to advance his interests or promote his comfort. "I loved him all through," he said to himself; "even in my anger I loved him."

Outside the March wind moaned round the house and drove the rain against the windows. Inside, the bright firelight fell on Hugh's face, already so like unto the face of the dead, and on Beatrice's black dress and bowed head.

Alas for my pretty Beatrice! what of her during those weary hours? She sat, her eyes fixed upon Hugh's face; she had possessed herself of one of his hands, and kept stroking it gently. When the doctors entered the room she would look up at them with mute, appealing eyes, neither speaking nor moving.

Ethelbert caught Dr. Armstrong watching her curiously; it set him thinking what he should do with her. As long as Hugh breathed he knew that it would be impossible to persuade her to leave her place by his side, even had he the heart to do so. The morning would bring others who must not find her there. Then he bethought himself of her mother, and determined to despatch a message to her as soon as the morning dawned. A low cry from Beatrice brought Ethelbert to her side and the three men from the next room. Dr. Armstrong bent over the sofa. "It is all over," he said.

With a cry which pierced one faithful heart of those who heard it, Beatrice threw her arms around the pros-

trate figure, while her head fell forward on to his bosom, in a mute anguish of despair.

"Come, come, my dear," said Dr. Hunt, a kind-hearted old man, of a religious turn of mind; "we must bow to the will of the Almighty."

Ethelbert silenced him with a look, and rather unceremoniously motioned them out of the room. "Beatrice," he said, "my dear one, come away with me."

She looked up at him with a glance of such heart-breaking entreaty that he could only turn away to hide his tears, and leave her there.

"My lord," said Dr. Armstrong when Ethelbert entered the room, "if there is anything which I can do on this melancholy occasion I hope that you will command me."

"No," answered Ethelbert, wearily throwing himself into an arm-chair as he spoke; "I am much obliged to you all. Some one ought to telegraph to Lady Atherling."

"Dr. Barry kindly undertook to break the news to the household in Eaton Square," said Dr. Armstrong. "Her ladyship has been sent for."

"Then there is nothing else. I need not detain you longer, gentlemen."

At this very broad hint the three doctors took their departure. Bertie recalled Dr. Barry. "I am half ashamed to ask it of you," he said, "but you will do me a great favor if you will take a note for me to Green Street. I had a carriage here; I don't know what has become of it."

"I took the liberty of dismissing it, my lord, and ordering another to be sent in its place; the man and

horse were both tired. I will go anywhere to oblige your lordship."

This was not a mere figure of speech; it was the first time that Dr. Barry had come in contact with a nobleman, and he was surprised to find Ethelbert bearing his honors so meekly.

Ethelbert wrote a hurried note to the Countess Villani, begging her to come to Beatrice immediately. This despatched, he re-entered his cousin's room, and sat looking at Beatrice without uttering a word. Already the dawn of a cold March morning had broken upon them. The fire had died out, and Ethelbert shivered as he sat. He went into the other room presently and took a glass of wine; the old housekeeper was sobbing by the window.

"Lord, lord, sir! he was a very kind gentleman; many and many's the sovereign he's given to me over and above my wages."

Ethelbert could not but contrast the old woman's somewhat selfish but honest sorrow with Dr. Armstrong's pompous phrases.

"He was kind to every one," he said, in a broken voice.

"So he were, sir, so he were. If there ain't some one at the door!" And she toddled off, wiping her eyes on her apron.

"I must tell Beatrice that her mother is here," thought Ethelbert. He found the poor child in the same position, moaning piteously over her dead. "Beatrice," he said, "Beatrice, do not break my heart."

She made no answer; perhaps she did not even hear him.

"By whose authority have I been excluded from this room?" said a voice from the doorway. Ethelbert turned and saw Ida standing on the threshold.

He put his finger to his lips, pointing to the dead man. Ida advanced into the room, following the direction of his eyes. Her own lighted upon Hugh. There he lay, the cold sunlight of the March morning falling on him, blind to the anguish of the woman he loved so well; deaf to the voice of the woman who had so cruelly wronged him. No word of praise or blame shall move him more,—he has done with all such things,—no more passionate regrets, no more bitter self-reproach. Death, the great consecrator, has laid his seal upon him; has so sanctified him that Ethelbert, looking at that placid face, forgets his wrongs, even though the prostrate figure kneeling there, with despairing face hidden on the dead man's breast, makes his heart ache with disappointed love and pain.

He turned from Ida with disgust. "This is no place for reproaches, Ida; you had better go," he said, with a weary sigh.

"I had better go? I think not, Lord Atherling; I at least have a right to remain here. May I ask if Miss Sutherland is here by your connivance and under your protection?"

"No, madam; Miss Sutherland is here under my protection," said a low voice by her side.

Ida turned quickly and looked at the speaker. "And who may you be?" her eyes seemed to say.

"Her mother," said the lady, answering the unspoken question.

"Indeed!"

There was a world of doubt in that one word.

"Nature does not lie," said the foreign lady, gravely. "Look at my face, then at hers."

"Then, may I ask by what right you and your daughter are here?"

Up to this moment the dead himself had not been more silent than Beatrice. Now, however, she lifted her head and looked Lady Atherling in the face.

"Go!" she said, pointing to the door. "Go! you deceived him, wicked and cruel woman that you are! You destroyed his life and mine. Death has freed him. Leave us! he is mine, now; mine by the great love I bore him." She rose as she spoke, drawing her slight figure to its full height. An agony so intense was in the young face that Ida turned and passed from the room quite silently, hushed in the presence of this overwhelming grief.

Beatrice watched her from the room. The unnatural effort which she had made had exhausted the little strength which that dreadful vigil had left her. She would have fallen had not Ethelbert caught her in his arms, where she lay as lifeless, to all appearance, as the man she so loved. Death was not gracious to her; he passed her by. Gradually the sad eyes opened slowly. The tired spirit, which had escaped for a moment from its pain, returned again. When she had sufficiently recovered Ethelbert whispered to her, "You must come away, Beatrice; come away with me. Others will be be here soon, and for his sake, dear, they must not find you here."

This aroused her.

"No," she said. "No, they must not find me here,

for his sake. The world would say what she said, 'that I have no right.' Where shall I go?"

"With your mother, dear; with your mother, who has come to you, now that you need her so sorely."

She rose slowly; bending forward, she pressed one last long kiss on the placid, lifeless face, and followed Ethelbert.

She allowed him to lead her down-stairs. Of her mother she took no notice, nor of Ida, who sat in the drawing-room. She seemed to cling to Ethelbert, and made no answer when her mother kissed her, with tears and many tender words. "I am nothing to her, nothing!" the poor woman thought, as she sat by her bedside all through that dark day on which died Hugh, Lord Atherling, and all the youth and hope and joy of the poor child who loved him so well.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

"It is pleasant to die, if there be gods;
And sad to live if there be none."
MARCUS ANTONINUS.

THREE years have passed since those solemn words, "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes," were read over all that was mortal of Hugh, Lord Atherling. Three weary years to those who had held him dear. Theodora was still living at Tetherby; still deeply interested in her school; still shunned by the good people of the county. Ethelbert reigned in his cousin's stead. He was far more popular than poor Hugh had ever been. His admirers were wont to say that the Earl of Atherling was the handsomest and most popular man in the United Kingdom. Many were the snares laid by wily mothers; their stratagems were unavailing. He was even proof against the seductions of a country house, and passed through each fiery ordeal scatheless. His most formidable adversary was his mother, who, having abandoned Theo's reformation as hopeless, turned all her attention towards Ethelbert. As each plan failed, she came to the distressing conclusion that Ethelbert's affections were engaged already.

"Is it possible, Theodora, that he is still thinking of that Italian girl who went off with a mysterious mother, just after poor Hugh died? What was her name?

Southerwood, Southerly, Sutherland? Yes, Sutherland," she said to her daughter one day, looking anxiously into her face.

"He was certainly very fond of her," answered Theo.

"Yes, and you encouraged him, taking them up in the way you did; however, they are safely out of the way now. I suppose that there is no doubt that they *are* in Italy."

"None whatever, I should suppose."

"Then, my dear, why does he neglect every opportunity of establishing himself in life? I am sure I have done my best. I stayed two or three weeks with those cotton people,—what was the name—Skinner? —though the mother dropped her H's, and was altogether perfectly fearful, that he might have a chance of seeing something of the daughter, a very nice girl, and quite presentable. Their wealth was enormous, positively *enormous,* and Bertie would not even look at her."

"Ethelbert declares that you ruined his prospects for him there: he swears that once when Miss Skinner was deploring her own great delicacy of constitution, you lamented with her, saying, 'Ah! my dear, you would not have been spared to us had you not been given every care, carried on cotton as you have been all your life;' and although the poor girl turned every color of the rainbow, you never discovered that you said anything absurd. 'Carried on cotton!'" repeated Theo, throwing herself back in her chair, and laughing until the tears were in her eyes. "Oh! mamma, that was an unfortunate speech."

"I don't believe that I ever said anything of the

kind," exclaimed Mrs. Baskervyle, in deep disgust. "Even if I did, of course she knew what I meant. They were most ridiculously careful of her. I suppose it was natural, being the only child, and such a fortune. Theodora, has it ever struck you that Bertie is very fond of the society of married women? I have sometimes feared that he might have formed some unfortunate liaison of that kind. Oh! married women are not what they were in my day."

"I don't think that 'liaisons' are much in Bertie's line, mamma. No, if he love any one it is Beatrice Sutherland."

"Ah! that would be worse than anything. Worse than an illicit affection for a married woman."

"Mamma, mamma, where is your Christianity?"

"I hope, Theodora, that I have given evidence of my Christianity during my life. Of course I mean that he could marry Miss Sutherland, which would be fearful. I always objected to it, even years ago, and since he has come into the property of course it is perfectly impossible."

A few days after this conversation Ethelbert appeared at Fern Bank.

"I've had a letter from the Countess Villani. She says that the doctors have alarmed her very much about her health, and wishes me to remind you of your promise. I think, Theo, that I shall go to Rome myself for a few weeks. I am so anxious. Were anything to happen to her mother what would Beatrice do, poor little thing?—return to that old catamaran, Miss Sutherland?" inquired Ethelbert, with more vehemence than elegance.

Theodora remained silently thoughtful for a moment, then said quietly,—

"Bertie, why should not I go? Since I have had Mrs. Rowland here I feel quite comfortable about leaving the children. I made a half promise to Countess Villani that in the event of her death Beatrice should find a home with me. I cannot be gone more than a few weeks. Let me answer the letter, at least, and offer to go."

"You can't travel alone," objected her brother. "I should be obliged to go with you."

"Ah! Bertie, 'obliged.' May you be forgiven! you know that you are dying to go, but you shall not. I'll go alone."

"All right. Just sit down and write now."

Theodora did so, and received a telegram in reply, begging her to come immediately.

Although she made her arrangements for departure with all possible expedition, she arrived but in time to soothe the last moments of the dying woman, who looked into her face with eyes more eloquent than words as she placed Theo's hand in that of her daughter. Already the priests waited in the room beyond, while Beatrice sank on her knees by the bedside, prepared to take part in those prayers which would be the last breathed into the ears of the dying woman. Theodora softly left the room. The mumbling of the priest, the sprinkling of the holy water, all of it seemed to her such a melancholy farce.

"Why can't they let her die in peace?" she exclaimed, aloud.

"That's just what I've been a-saying any time this

last week, ma'am," said the voice of Keen. "It's the money them priests is after, depend upon it. Waiting to get all they can from that poor lamb, though the Lord knows she'll need all she's got badly enough."

Keen had elected to follow Beatrice, much to the disgust of her former mistress.

"Look here, Keen," Miss Sutherland had said, "if you choose to go with my niece you need never expect to be taken into my service again. Miss Beatrice has behaved in the most ungrateful manner. I told her, 'If you go with your mother I wash my hands of you.' Now I tell you that you may choose between us. Which is it to be?"

"Well, miss," Keen had answered, "I can't find it in my heart to let her go away among foreigners all alone like; and though I'm sorry to leave you, miss, after all those years, sure the next one will do as well by you as I could."

"Oh, yes! the next one will do for me," the old lady had said, in her hard, rasping voice, while Keen courtesied herself out.

The faithful old soul had followed Beatrice and her mother, nursing the latter with untiring devotion, never complaining, though the idle listlessness of the Italians was as gall and wormwood to her, and the sight of a priest had the effect of a red flag shaken in the face of a bull. It was she who led Beatrice from the room when all was over, while Theodora greeted inquiring friends and discussed the arrangements for the funeral with the reverend father in such Italian as she could command.

"You did not assist at the last rites of our holy

church," he said, looking rather curiously at her from under his heavy eyebrows. "Does your church forbid your doing so?"

"I am of no church," Theo had answered, with a cold smile; "I am an atheist."

The priest lowered his eyes with an expression of shocked disapproval, and stole from the room noiselessly, as is the wont of the genus "priest."

"You have heard the truth for once in your life, my good man," said Theo to herself, "and not under the seal of confession, either."

The funeral over, Theodora was very anxious that they should leave immediately for England. The little property which the Countess Villani had to leave was naturally left to Beatrice. It consisted of some two thousand pounds, which she had managed to save out of the yearly income left her by her late husband, and some handsome jewels and laces. Leaving the matter in a lawyer's hands, Theo arranged that an early day should be fixed for their departure. Nevertheless, over three weeks had elapsed ere they found themselves at Fern Bank.

"Beatrice," Theo said, one morning shortly after their arrival, "I wish that I could interest you in my school; work is the true balm of Gilead. Child, I know that, for at one time in my life I suffered, and a kind friend came to me. He opened my eyes to the misery of others, and showed me how to help them. In helping others I helped myself. My sorrow did not cease altogether, but it is stilled now, I hope, forever."

"It was not death, Theodora. Ah, how true it is that there is nothing in life irrevocable save death! I

have been like this ever since he was taken from me,—hopeless, spiritless, weary of all things. Now that my mother has gone too, one link the less binds me to this earth. Ah, Theo! if I were like you,—if I believed that this world were all, that the promises of future reunion with those we love are all false,—I think that my heart would break. When we first went to Italy, mamma and I, she used to try and persuade me go out a little; but, though to please her I would sometimes consent, the sight of the cold, smiling faces of those I met used to make me exclaim in my anguish what was said of old, 'There is no sorrow like unto my sorrow; is it nothing to you all who pass by?' but when I thought of your life and his and my poor mother's, then it seemed to me that no one was happy, and that the sooner it was all over the better."

"There is much in life that is sadder than death," Theo said, quietly. "Death came near to me once in my life, when I lost my father. All the world changed for me. I think that it has never been the same since; but I did not suffer then as I have suffered since. I think of my father so often, and my thoughts are always happy ones. I dream of him, too, and awake strengthened and softened, but the memory of my married life is utterly, utterly hateful to me. I put all remembrance of it from me; I don't even understand how I could ever have loved him. Looking back, I have not the slightest sympathy with my former self; yet the recollection of all that passed then, all I then suffered, comes over me again and again, undoing all that I have been striving so hard to do, destroying my peace, which I fight for and ere long recover."

"Yet if it were all to come over again would you act so very differently?" asked Beatrice.

"Indeed I would,—with my present experience, that is. Some one has said that experience is a fine word for suffering, which is very true."

"Yes, too true. Tell me, Theodora, how could I help you in the school? I can't lecture as you can. As to mathematics, a problem always has the same effect upon me as that dreadful question, 'If Dick's father were Tom's son, what relation would Dick be to Tom?'"

Theo laughed. "I will tell you what you can do,—teach Susan Howe her music; the child has an almost boundless love for it, so much so that I found that she would never devote her entire energy to anything else. She is fitting herself to be a teacher. Several of the girls were ambitious to follow her example, but she is, of the whole fourteen, the only one with sufficient talent; it is almost genius."

Beatrice undertook the task with alacrity. The piano, which had been Hugh's gift, was an excellent instrument, the girl an apt pupil. All her old love for music awoke when her hands again touched the keys.

Oldham came in unexpectedly one day, and vanished again in search of Theo.

"Saint Cecilia is in the drawing-room," was his greeting when he spied the mistress of the house out among the roses. "I vanished, not knowing quite what would be the manner of greeting between saints."

"My saint accommodates herself wonderfully to the habits and customs of this mundane sphere, though

how she manages it I know not. Come in and apologize for your rudeness. Is she not beautiful?"

"I hardly had time for more than a general impression. I should not have recognized her."

"She has had a great deal of trouble," said Theo, with a sigh. "Ethelbert has been so good: he came down from Saturday till Monday, and behaved beautifully; simply friendly and kind. She seemed so relieved, poor little soul!"

CHAPTER XXV.

FACE TO FACE.

"How he lies in his rights of a man!
Death has done all death can."

ROBERT BROWNING.

OLDHAM took up his abode at the village inn again that spring, and Theodora began to watch for his well-known figure through the lanes and along the shore. Ethelbert fumed somewhat in private, but Theodora's honest acknowledgment of the pleasure she had in his society kept him quiet, notwithstanding his inward misgivings. He contented himself with more frequent visits to Fern Bank and an occasional council of war with his mother.

"I think that April is not keeping up its character of 'the fair mid-spring,'" said Theo, as she stood one evening gazing from the window. The sun had sunk

into a bank of angry clouds, and with its departure the wind rose, sweeping across the sea in fitful, angry gusts, which told of rising fury, as yet only in its birth, while the "white caps of the sea" flashed ominously, and the darkness came on apace.

"'Winter forgotten long, and summer near,'" she said to herself. "It looks very like it."

"It's going to be a very ugly night," prophesied Bertie, joining his sister. "Oldham, I don't know that I ever saw a more angry sky. If you take my advice, you will let me give you a lift as far as the village; I'm going by the eight o'clock train," he added, looking at his watch.

The two men made their adieux, and Theodora, drawing the curtains, took a low seat by the fire. Beatrice sat opposite, old memories stirring in her heart. The driving rain as it swept across the windows, and the wild March wind, were as

"The sound of old sobs and the track of old tears"

to her, bringing fruitless retrospective thoughts and a vision of that March night when so much of her life had passed from her.

Theodora, who had watched her as those who love well only can watch, had some dim consciousness of what was passing in her mind. She sat, therefore, silent, and when Beatrice rose to bid her good-night she kissed her without a word, though she sighed as she listened to the girl's weary step as she ascended the stairs.

A strange, hitherto unknown feeling of unrest possessed Theodora that night. It was in vain that she turned and turned on her bed; she could not drown

the fierce voice of the wind, which now moaned through the pines and again swept with wild, human-like cries round and round the house, while in every lull of the storm the sound of dashing billows smote upon the ear as though the waves were saying—

"We too are here, and ready for the fray."

More than once she rose and gazed from the window, but in vain. The darkness was the darkness of chaos. Towards morning the rain ceased, and Theodora, despairing of rest, rose and prepared to dress. She was surprised by a knock at her door, which she opened, and discovered Beatrice on the threshold.

"I thought I heard you moving, Theo," the girl said. "Is there anything wrong?"

"No, child; what should be wrong? But nature is at war. So am I; the very spirit of the hurricane has entered into me. All night I have been listening to the battle between the wind and the rain. The winds have conquered. Do you not hear them shouting the news of their victory to the ocean? I must be out in it, Beatrice; the house stifles me. Don't look at me as though I were distraught. I want to look at the ocean; its unrest brings me peace. Let me go, dear. Sleep you safe and warm till I come back."

"But Theo, it is madness!" objected Beatrice. "Sleep! I should not close my eyes. If go you will, let me go with you; it is light enough already for us to make our way to the shore."

"Nonsense, child!" said Theo. "Why should you face the wind, a little delicate thing like you? I enjoy it."

"If you go, I go too," was Beatrice's answer, spoken in a tone of quiet determination which silenced opposition.

Together they made their way along the soaked garden-paths until they came to the flight of broken steps which led down through the chine to the sea-shore. Here they were slightly sheltered from the wind. Both women turned and faced each other when, above the roaring of the sea and the howling of the wind, the heavy boom of a gun broke on their ears. It was the signal from the coast-guard station. Seizing Beatrice by the hand, Theodora hurried on; another moment brought them to the small esplanade which stood before the few fishermen's huts which were on the beach. In the midst of these stood a more imposing building, the coast-guard station, from whose door there streamed a ruddy light, while a crowd of men, women, and children stood gazing, with affrighted eyes, at a vessel that, seemingly powerless, came driving on to her own destruction. Those who watched, marvelled at the way in which she was being handled. Again the gun was fired and signals run up telling them to stand off, but all without avail. Onward she came, nearer and nearer to the fatal rocks. The life-boat had already been drawn out, and some dozen brave men, with solemn, anxious faces, stood ready to risk their lives, with all the quiet force of Englishmen prepared to do their duty written on their rough-hewn faces. Conspicuous among them stood Oldham; he had divested himself of his coat, and was evidently bent on taking his place as one of the crew of the brave little boat.

"Now, boys," he said, "let us be off; not you,

Tom," he added, thrusting aside an old man, who, with his hand on his son's arm, pressed forward. "Not you; Jack will be with us, and one of a family is enough."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the old man; "but Jack and me is the only ones that is left now, and we will see it out together."

Not a moment was to be lost, truly, and ere Oldham had caught sight of Theo he had entered the life-boat, which in a few seconds was battling with the angry waters. Twice, thrice she was almost overpowered; not one of those who watched but held his breath, expecting that the next wave would engulf her, until she emerged from the surf and rode comparatively safe upon the dark waters. Meanwhile the ill-fated vessel still bore down towards the rocks. Presently a great cry went up from those on shore; a dull thud was heard; the taut little craft shook from stem to stern; a crash followed the strike, and away went the foremast. She had struck her "forefoot" on a sunken rock. As the wave receded she heeled over. Her ill-fated crew clung together as men will do when death is near,—death, who with his cold hand parts those nearest and dearest, seeming to say, "Cling to your kind as you may, no one can pass with you my dark portals; a moment will come when you must taste the bitterness of solitude, the moment in which you will stand trembling between existence and annihilation ere the dark veil be lifted which hides you know not what." A line of rosy light had long since heralded the dawn, and now the great sun rose in a blaze of glory, scattering the dark clouds and bringing a ray of hope to the hearts of those who

watched, while right in the line of light which he cast the life-boat rode bravely on, each vigorous stroke bringing her nearer and nearer to the now fast settling vessel. Again a cry went up from the watchers; lower and lower she sank until a mighty wave swept her deck from bow to stern. When Beatrice, who had hidden her face in wild horror, looked again no human being was to be seen upon the deck, though dark forms were seen to struggle with the angry waves, and the life-boat, which was now as near as they dared venture, was doing good service. Man after man was rescued; yet, alas, man after man went down without word or cry, down under the cruel waves, which are forever singing the requiem of their dead. It was an hour or more ere the boat put about; then, borne swiftly onward by the fast-flowing tide, she came in, bearing more than half the shipwrecked crew safely to land. A hearty English cheer arose as she was drawn, not without difficulty, on to the beach. A hand was laid on Oldham's arm; turning, he saw Theodora.

"Theo," he exclaimed in his surprise, calling her by her first name, "what are you doing here?"

"I have come to ask you to have those poor creatures sent up to my house; it is so near, and Beatrice has gone on to have everything in readiness. What are they saying there?—that a man is dead?"

"Yes, I fear that is the case. There is a woman, who is unconscious. I will tell them to take her to Fern Bank."

"Yes, pray do; they are carrying her into the boat-house, poor creature! I will go up directly."

Oldham hastened to do her bidding, and Theodora

moved away towards a group gathered round a prostrate figure over which the doctor was bending.

"'Tis the owner of the yacht," she heard a man say. "Poor fellow, he is gone! Most like the lady is his wife. God help her!"

They made room as Theo approached, and she stood behind the doctor. He raised his head slowly. "He is dead," pointing to the lifeless figure beneath him. Theodora looked down; then, to the amazement of the bystanders, she sank on her knees by the side of the dead man, with a cry of horror which brought Reginald to her side in alarm.

"No, no, not dead!" she said, seizing the doctor by the arm. "Alfred, Alfred!" she cried, bending over the prostrate figure.

Reginald looked, and turned sick with a kind of terror. There, at the feet of the woman he had wronged so cruelly, lay Alfred Fanshawe. His dark hair was matted round his pale face, the thin lips half parted, the serge yatching suit which he wore clung to his perfect form, while the look of peace which death alone gives was on his quiet face.

"What is it?" they asked.

"He is her husband," Oldham answered, simply. "Come, Theodora, come."

Theo rose.

"Can you do nothing, nothing?" she cried, turning to the doctor.

He shook his head sadly.

Reginald took her hand and led her slowly away. Thus hand in hand they made their way slowly up the cliff towards Fern Bank, neither speaking.

As they reached the hall-door Beatrice met them. One look at Theo's face was enough for her.

"Theo," she said, "Theo, what is it?"

"It is the end," Theodora answered, as she entered the house, and passed onward towards her own room, where even Beatrice dared not follow.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT HER MERCY.

"O death, the consecrator!
Nothing so sanctifies a name
As to be written—dead;
Nothing so wins a life from blame,
So covers it from wrath and shame,
As does the burial-bed."

"WHAT does it mean?" asked Beatrice, turning towards Oldham, her face full of surprise and fear.

He led the way into the drawing-room, closed the door, and said, with a ring of bitterness in his voice,—

"It means that the vessel which went down but an hour since was the property of Alfred Fanshawe, whose corpse lies down below on the shore there. It means that notwithstanding all the misery he has caused her she loves him still."

"Poor Theo! poor Theo!" was all Beatrice could say. "That he should die like that, unforgiven and at her very doors, as it were! Oh, Mr. Oldham, what

can we do to comfort her? what can we do to help her?"

Oldham shook his head gloomily. "Do not ask me," he said. "I confess I do not understand women; I have no conception what she would wish. I should not suppose that this house need shelter him alive or dead."

"Ah," Beatrice answered, "you do not understand women, at least not Theo. I am quite, quite sure that she has ceased to love him, but she is the last woman in the world to carry her resentment beyond the grave."

"I cannot take any steps without her sanction. I cannot tell them to bring him here after all that has come and gone; 'twould seem such a mockery."

"Death seems to smooth away all such considerations," Beatrice said, simply. "I think that I may give the order to have him brought here; I am sure that is what Theodora would wish."

Oldham merely bowed his head in token of assent. He left the house shortly, and himself superintended the removal of the body from the boat-house, where they had laid him, to Fern Bank. Beatrice, meantime, returned to the bedside of the young girl, over whom the doctor was bending anxiously, while two of the women-servants stood by divided between pity and curiosity.

"Is she any better?" Beatrice asked, approaching the bedside and looking down at the pretty, childlike face so deadly pale. The lips were parted, and every now and again a broken sigh gave signs of returning consciousness.

"I think she will do now," he answered. "Keep

her warm and give a spoonful of brandy now and again. You can't tell me, I suppose, if she is Captain Fanshawe's sister or any relation?" he added, lowering his voice, that Beatrice alone might catch the words.

"Indeed I cannot; but in any case we shall take every care of her."

"Yes, of course; that is not exactly what I mean," stammered the old doctor. He found it impossible to explain exactly what he did mean to this grave-eyed girl, who stood looking him straight in the face, so mumbled something about its not being agreeable to Mrs. Fanshawe.

"You need not fear that," said Beatrice, relieved. "My friend is always glad of an opportunity to do a kindness."

"Yes, yes, no doubt. Perhaps I'd better see Mr. Oldham, and arrange matters with him," said the old man, as he shuffled from the room.

He found Oldham standing by the kitchen-fire trying rather vainly to dry his saturated garments. Beckoning him from the room, he unbosomed himself.

"Very awkward thing this about that young woman," he began.

"What young woman?" asked Oldham, whose mind had indeed been too full of other things to remember the poor girl whom he had that morning snatched from a watery grave.

"That girl who was saved from the yacht. They have brought her up here, and who she is or what she is we don't know. I asked one of the men, and he looked very queer."

"I'll speak to the skipper," said Oldham; "he'll be up

here presently. In the mean time nothing can be done until we have Mrs. Fanshawe's orders. There he comes now. Poor old fellow! he's dreadfully cut up about the loss of the yacht."

True to his word, Oldham interrogated the old man.

"Well, sir," he said, in answer to Oldham's outspoken question, "she's a poor young thing what has lived with the master seven years or more. She's three children, though you wouldn't believe it to look at her; and for all she w'nt married to him regular-like, she's none of them low, bold creeters, but a quiet, decent-spoken young woman as you'd wish to see. I hope the lady won't be for turning her out, sir, because of her misfortune?"

"No, the lady will do all that is kind," answered Oldham, though he looked very grave on hearing these words. "Tell me," he continued, "how did you manage to lose your yacht?"

"Aye, sir! you may well ask," groaned the old man. "I'm not for laying the blame on them that can't speak for themselves, but the master was that stubborn there weren't no doing nothing with him. Yesterday afternoon says I to him,—we were off Deal harbor then,—'It's looking very squally, sir. I'm thinking we'd better put in.'

"'Nonsense!' says he. 'She's going well with the wind; she'll stand anything we're likely to get to-night.'

"Well, sir, not two hours after a storm broke,—such a storm as I've never seen the like of, save once in the Bay o' Biscay. She was a fine yacht, sir; not more than a hundred tons, but as tight a little craft as I ever

wish to sail in. It was pitch dark, and not knowing the coast very well, I kept her pretty well out. I was beginning to hope that we would weather it right enough, when I found that she wasn't answering her helm. The rudder was gone. I knew it was all up with us then, sir, for the wind was dead against us, blowing us right in shore. When I told the master he never said a word, but he went below and brought the young lady up; he tied a life-belt around her—there was plenty of them on board—and another round himself. He didn't seem to think of the ship or the men, nothing except of her, and when she went down—and I was the last man to leave her—still them two was together."

"Yes, we picked them up at the same time," said Oldham. "He must have got that blow on the head, which killed him, while trying to reach the boat."

"Likely enough, sir. Ah! it's a sad thing when them that's young is taken. A fine, handsome young fellow he was, too, and free with his money."

Then he went on to tell how until the vessel had struck, and they knew that all was lost, every man had stuck to his post: it was one of those simple records of duty done, of danger faced, and brave devotion of which the world seldom hears. How many die yearly, die at their post, with no eye to mark their devotion, no words in praise thereof!

> "None to bear witness or reckon the cost
> Of the name which is saved by the life which is lost."

Oldham listened in a kind of dream; he was thinking all the time of Theodora, and wondering for the

hundredth time how it was with her. At last he could bear it no longer, and recommending the old skipper to the cook's tenderest care, he sought the drawing-room, and despatched Julia with a message begging Beatrice to come to him.

She came presently, and found him gazing from the window with a face full of anxiety.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I'm in a very difficult position," Oldham said, abruptly, feeling that it was better to come to the point at once and not to be influenced by any false ideas of propriety. "The fact of the matter is I find that the girl up-stairs has been travelling alone with Captain Fanshawe. I was thinking that perhaps we might manage to get her out of the house before Mrs. Fanshawe reappears. Naturally, her presence will be very painful to your friend."

"But it is impossible," objected Beatrice; "the poor creature has but just recovered from a swoon into which she had fallen, and is now delirious. To move her now might be the cause of her death."

"And the best thing which can happen to her," said Oldham, sadly.

"Theodora would not think so, I am quite sure."

Oldham sighed as he answered, "Perhaps not; still you must remember that a woman finds it hard to forgive her rival, her husband lying dead under the same roof. What a mockery the whole thing seems!"

"If I thought that Theo retained the slightest love for her husband," murmured Beatrice, "I should understand how dreadful the presence of this poor woman might be to her; but knowing as I do how utterly she

has blotted him out from her heart, I feel sure that she would never forgive me were I to allow her to be removed."

"You are sure that she does not love him?"

"Quite sure; why should you imagine that she does? Do you think her one who can so easily forgive?"

"She has said things at times which have made me doubt her strength, and there is a passage in one of her books which made me think that she had gone through a more bitter experience than we know of."

He took up "Nudum Pactum" as he spoke, and pointed to the following paragraph:

"Over the waste of years that separate us I gaze with eyes which are full of regretful tenderness, albeit they have no tears. I even ask my heart if it love you still. Poor heart! which you have thrown so carelessly from you to be crushed by an unheeding world, which knoweth not its bitterness nor intermeddleth with its joy; for should a stranger be more tender than you, who have given it throb for throb?"

Beatrice smiled. "She would not have written it had she felt it," she was about to say, when the door opened and Theodora entered the room. She was very pale, but as calm as ever she had been when, standing before her scholars, she gave her lecture on logic. Reginald Oldham's dark face flushed at the sight of her, while almost involuntarily he made a step forward. Theodora placed her hand in his, thanking him, in a voice in which there was no trace of emotion, for his kindness, and at the same time chiding him in that he had been so neglectful as never even to have removed his damp garments.

"As to you, Beatrice," she said, with one of her rare smiles, "you may walk off to bed immediately, and let me take your place by that poor girl's bedside. Is she better?"

"Yes, much better," stammered Beatrice; then she looked towards Mr. Oldham and hesitated.

Reginald avoided her eyes. Man-like, he shrank from the painful task of telling Theo the wretched truth, and, in common with the rest of his sex, he labored under the impression that such disagreeables should be left to women. He therefore meanly deserted, leaving the two women face to face.

When the door had closed upon him, and even the sound of his retreating footsteps had died away, Beatrice told her story. Theodora listened in silence. She looked so cold and stern that tender-hearted Beatrice was deceived, and thought it necessary to put in a plea for the poor woman up-stairs.

"She is so young," she murmured, "and looks so dreadfully ill."

Theodora stooped to kiss the sweet face, fully understanding the womanly pity which had prompted her last speech.

"Poor creature!" she said, with a weary sigh. "Let us go to her, dear."

Together they entered the sick-room, nor did Theodora leave it until the rival whom fate had thrown upon her mercy lay quietly sleeping.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WORLD'S JUDGMENT.

"The popular religion represents only the female element in the national mind, at once devotional, slanderous, timid, gossiping, narrow, shrieking, and prudish."

THE following day brought Ethelbert and his mother: they arrived at rather an unfortunate time. The Rev. George Playfair and his wife had called to offer their services "at this trying time," as the rector chose to call it. It was but the second time that he had honored Theo with a visit, and she now resented the intrusion not a little. When Mrs. Baskervyle was announced the Rev. George, with a preliminary cough, had just begun, "I think it my duty, Mrs. Fanshawe."

Theodora had a very shrewd suspicion of what he considered his duty on this especial occasion. Her mother's advent, therefore, was doubly unwelcome.

"My poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Baskervyle. "How dreadfully ill you look! and no wonder, after the misery which you have undergone. Ah, Mr. Playfair, this is indeed a melancholy occasion. Truly one is taken and the other left; the wheel is broken at the fountain and the pitcher at the cistern." Then noticing something very like a smile flitting across her daughter's face she ceased her quotations, but continued her lament over the departed. Theodora possessed her soul in

patience while this comedy played itself out, awaiting the blow which she felt sure would be struck. Presently it came. With another introductory cough the man of God began,—

"I feel it my duty, Mrs. Fanshawe, to warn you that the—the young person whom you have admitted into your house, doubtless with the kindest intentions, is not a fit person for you, *of all persons*, to harbor. As your spiritual adviser, I should feel that I fell short in my Christian duty were I not to tell you that, upon questioning the sailors, I to-day ascertained that this unfortunate young woman was travelling alone with Captain Fanshawe at the time of his lamented death." He looked towards Theo, expecting some answer, but no statue was ever more dumb than Mrs. Fanshawe; she merely bowed her head.

"I know of a very respectable woman in the village who will, I believe, consent to take in this person until she can be removed to London," said Mrs. Playfair. "Of course it is impossible that she should remain here," she continued, glancing at Mrs. Baskervyle as she spoke.

"Quite impossible," responded Theodora's mother, in a tone of great decision.

Then they all looked at Theo, expecting that she would speak. She did not disappoint them. With a mighty effort she steadied her voice. Fixing her eyes upon the clergyman, she said,—

"I do not know since when you have taken upon yourself the office of my spiritual adviser. I was a resident in your parish for one year before you thought fit to make my acquaintance. Since that time you have

never entered my house; my spiritual welfare must truly be a matter of great moment to you. You now come with false words of condolence on your lips, when you must know that there is no subject for condolence, and with hypocritical phrases about duty try to turn from her the only friend which an unfortunate woman has in whom she can trust in this her hour of need. I know that she was my husband's mistress,—I know that she is the mother of his children; but were I actuated by any vindictive feeling in the matter I should sooner think of exercising it on his dead body than on this poor young creature, his victim, and the victim of a false state of society, and such as you. That girl does not leave my house until she is strong and well, and what is in my power to do to repair the injury which that dead man did unto her and her children shall be done. You need not trouble yourself about the poor child; I'm sure I don't know why you did not pass by on the other side, after the manner of your cloth from the earliest times."

The Rev. George was speechless; his wife, however, woman-like, retained something of her self-possession.

"Had we known the spirit in which you would take advice," she said, in her most dignified manner, "we should not have made this visit."

"Let me beg that it may be the last, madam," said Theo, bending her proud head about a quarter of an inch and touching the bell as she spoke.

"That it certainly will," answered the rector, and he and his spouse made their way from the room ere Julia had time to answer the bell.

"Oh, Theodora, Theodora!" exclaimed her mother,

ere they were well out of hearing, "what will you do next?"

"What I always have done,—denounce humbug whenever I meet with it," answered her daughter.

"Ethelbert," cried Mrs. Baskervyle, as her son entered the room, "I must beg you to speak to Theodora. I really believe she has taken leave of her senses. She has just turned the clergyman and his wife out of the house."

"Theodora," said Bertie, "what does it mean?"

Theodora explained, in as few words as possible, the position of affairs. "You surely would not advise me to turn a dying woman out of my house?" she said.

"No," answered her brother; "but I think it's very quixotic of you to constitute yourself the girl's nurse. Let one of the servants look after her until she's well enough to be moved, and then give her a ten-pound note and let her go."

"I will not stay in the house with that young woman," said Mrs. Baskervyle, in desperation.

"Then, my dear mother, Bertie had better take you back to town. When the evil one has departed, I'll let you both know, and you'll be welcome to return."

She was bitterly hurt, poor Theo; the last two days had tried her pride not a little. The tears were very near her eyes as she turned from them both and walked to the window, from which she could see the blue ocean dancing and sparkling innocently under the bright sunshine.

Presently a strong arm stole round her, and Bertie's laughing eyes looked into hers.

"Dear old Theo!" he said. "Do you think I'd leave

you now if you were to ask all Bedlam to stay in the house?"

Theo smiled in spite of herself. "No, Bertie, I don't believe you would," she answered, heartily.

True to her threat, Mrs. Baskervyle departed, and Theo made no effort to detain her.

"I've bad news for you, old girl," said Bertie, as he sat in the little drawing-room that evening with his sister; "very bad news. That India bank that poor Hugh invested in has gone to smash, and poor little Beatrice has lost her ten thousand pounds. If you'll only consent to a little piece of deception it need never make any difference. I can pay her dividends all the same. She'll never know from whence they come."

"I don't think I can agree to that, Bertie. I should resent anything of the kind so intensely myself."

"Nonsense! With you it would be very different, but that poor little thing—will you tell me what she is to do?"

"Continue to live with me, I hope. There need be no obligation, though I know that she will make difficulties just at first."

"Of course she will make difficulties,—any amount," exclaimed Bertie, indignantly. "Do, like a good girl, say nothing about this miserable bank."

Against her better judgment Theo consented; in truth she felt herself unable at that moment to argue the point. Self-repression may be kept up with considerable persistency for a whole lifetime, even, but the moment comes sooner or later when nature asserts herself, and physically or mentally those who have been strong enough to bear their burden in uncomplaining silence

pay the price of their strength. The intense honesty of soul which distinguished Theo made it impossible for her not to acknowledge that the horror which her husband's sudden death had caused—a horror which still oppressed her—was not the result of any deep grief or produced by any lingering love for the dead man, but merely the natural effect of the suddenness with which she had been brought face to face with so terrible a death. Perhaps, during those dark hours which she passed in the solitude of her own room, the thought which was most exquisite pain to her was that in her heart she could find no tenderness. All resentment had long since passed away. "I dare not think of him," she murmured, "for I cannot think without judging him. Ah, if the memory of my married life could but die with him!" Again and again these memories would pass over her. How clearly she could see his face as it was when first he won her for his own, and again when he had stood before her in Baden, smiling with a lie on his lips, and lastly as she had seen him that morning! Often had she pictured to herself a meeting between herself and her husband. She had thought that weary of the world he might come back to her with words of weak repining and entreaty for forgiveness; half unconsciously she repeated the lines,—

> "Ye need not dread his weeping,—tears are vain;
> Here let him perish and unheeded lie;
> He comes not to complain,
> He only comes to die."

It was indeed the end, as she had said,—the end of her wrongs, though not of their results,—the end of the

one love of her life. "So be it," she said, as she rose from the chair into which she had thrown herself. "If I cannot be gay, let a passionless peace be my lot."

It was finally arranged that the dead man should be taken to his brother's house, the home of his boyhood, there to be buried. Theo had refused the invitation which had been sent to her to be present at the funeral. Ethelbert, too, expressed his unwillingness to go. The night, however, before the removal of the body she stood for a few moments looking down upon the face, so peaceful, so cold, so far beyond praise or blame. She spoke no word, shed no tear, but when she left the room she gave expression to all that had passed through her mind.

"I know not how it is," she said to Beatrice; "but when he was alive and able to defend himself I never wavered, never doubted but that I had right and justice on my side. Yet when I stood just now looking at his lifeless face, so strangely altered, I, who had always felt so far above him, became suddenly humble before him."

The servants, too, had slipped in by twos and threes and gazed with a certain awe and admiration on the placid, handsome face. They felt what was almost a kindly sympathy for their mistress's dead husband.

"Mebbe she were a bit hard on him," said the upper housemaid, expressing the sentiments of the entire female portion of poor Theo's establishment. But if they could forgive and excuse the beautiful, dissolute man, their wrath against the woman, one of themselves, who, instead of lying in his place, was carefully tended by their mistress, knew no bounds.

"I won't wait on the likes of her for one," said the

cook. And though the threat was never carried into execution, Beatrice had seen enough of what was going on to induce her to telegraph for Keen, who came, ready to nurse Lucifer himself had it been the will of her adored young mistress.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WOMAN'S STORY.

"Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!"

DAYS grew to weeks ere the sick woman up-stairs, who had been the cause of so much offence, was able to leave her bed. Before that time came she had learned to love Beatrice, almost worship her indeed, and now she sat at the window, her large blue eyes fixed upon Beatrice's face. Presently Beatrice looked up and caught the sad intensity of that look.

"Why do you not read, Edith?" she asked. "It is better than dreaming."

"I was not dreaming, Miss Sutherland," the girl answered, sadly. "I've done with dreams; but I was thinking that it would have been better for me and for all had I never been rescued from the sea yonder, but had sunk and carried all my misery with me."

"You should not feel like that," Beatrice said, gravely. "Your life has been spared for some wise

purpose. God has given you children, and your place is one which no human being could ever fill. You should think of them, and be thankful that an object in life has not been denied you, and that you have yet the future before you, which will be happy because useful."

"I can never be happy again; I do not deserve to be that. And how can I be useful when all my life I must bear this load of guilt? How can I expect my children to love me when I am their misfortune and they are mine?"

The girl spoke bitterly, hopelessly. Beatrice looked at her with a pity which was almost divine as she made answer:

"Please do not say that; do not undervalue the power of your motherhood. Do you not see that the very fact of having three helpless children to protect, to shelter, above all to love, makes your existence of paramount importance? The greatest capabilities open out before you."

"You speak as though you were speaking to an honest woman, the mother of children honestly begotten," said Edith, her whole soul in her eyes.

Beatrice paused for a moment; what she had to say was hard. Presently she moved from her place by the table and came and stood by the window at which the poor girl was seated.

"Against God and against your children only have you sinned. In your hands lies the power to repair the wrong of which you have been guilty towards your children; do your duty towards them truly and honestly, and God will forgive the sins of your youth."

"Your words comfort me,—I have so little kindness,

so very little. You and Mrs. Fanshawe are the only ladies to whom I have spoken for six long years. There have been times when a kind word, a little encouragement from good women, might have induced me to forsake the life I was leading,—times when he has left me and seemed indifferent to me and to the children; when I longed to do better, and the sight of their little faces was wretchedness to me; when I *would* have done better had there been any one in the whole of God's great world to help me; but nobody seemed to care," she said, in conclusion, with a weary sigh.

"You must not let that influence you; you must care yourself. No one can make you other than you are; no one can do as much for you as you can do for yourself."

"But I have failed,—I have no strength; how can I trust myself?"

"By proving yourself to be trustworthy; by being true to what is noble within you."

"Miss Sutherland," Edith said, raising herself up with a great effort and looking at Beatrice, a pitiful entreaty in her eyes, "may I tell you the story of my life? When you know all, then, if you can forgive me, I shall feel happier in listening to your kind words."

"Yes, tell me," said Beatrice, seating herself by her side; "tell me everything, if you can do so without giving yourself too much pain."

Without another word Edith began her story.

"My father was a farmer," she said; "his superiority to most of those in his own rank of life, and the fact of his being counted rich, made him dreadfully

unpopular. His landlord, however, old Colonel Stirling, was very fond of him, and it was through his instrumentality that my mother became the wife of one really far below her, not only socially but in every respect. She had been the daughter of an officer in the army, who, dying young, left his widow and her three children almost penniless. When she was but eighteen she became the governess of Colonel Stirling's daughters. He was a kind old man, though his wife was proud and unkind,—ah, how unkind she was to me!—and my mother would have been happier had she remained with them, as she might have done, as companion to Miss Alice, who was out of her mind, or innocent, as we call it in our country; but she was weak and ailing, so when my father offered to marry her she did not refuse. I was her only child, and I can hardly remember her. I have heard others say that she was a very pretty girl, though she changed sadly ere she died. I was but eight years old at that time, and being too young to go to a boarding-school, Mrs. Stirling used to have me up at the great house to play with Miss Alice. I almost lived there until I was ten or eleven, when father suddenly determined to send me to a boarding-school. I learned a good deal there, for I learned to study, and I was very fond of my music, and played a good deal. When I was seventeen my father married again, and I was sent for to come home. I came. Such a home as it was for me afterwards no one can ever know. My step-mother hated me, and indeed there was little love lost between us. She was a hard-working, coarse, passionate woman; she had been a widow when my father married her, and her two daughters lived

with us. They were not like her, though they were ignorant and awkward; still, had they dared I think that they would have been kind. I wanted to teach them, but she would not allow it, and father said in his hard, scornful way that it would be waste of time. 'You can't make a silk purse out o' a sow's ear,' were his words; 'you're the lady of the family, girl, like your mother before you.'

"This made my step-mother all the more furious against me. It was no wonder that I went more and more to the great house, where I was always welcome and where every one was so kind. Mrs. Stirling I seldom saw, but Miss Alice would run down when she saw me coming, and take me up to her own pretty room and make much of me, telling me how pretty I was, how much prettier than the ladies who were staying in the house. I liked to be there; I liked the quiet of the beautiful old house, the ease of the chairs, the thousand pretty things with which Miss Alice was surrounded, of which she seemed to think nothing, but which to me represented all the beauty of life. You see, Miss Sutherland, I had been taught to desire all that wealth brings, even to expect it. One of poor Miss Alice's favorite amusements was to dress me in her own handsome dresses, of which she had a great number. I suppose it was a comfort to her mother that she should have everything of the best because of her misfortune. One day she had decked me out in a beautiful blue silk of her own, flowers in my hair, and jewels on my neck and arms. She was delighted with her handiwork, and I stood before the glass as pleased as was she herself, when the door opened and a young gentleman came in.

"'I knocked twice, Alice, and you did not hear me,' he said.

"I, in the mean time, had slipped behind the cheval-glass, but Miss Alice, knowing no better,—poor, innocent thing!—dragged me out laughing.

"'Isn't she pretty, Cousin Alfred?' she said.

"He didn't say yes, but he looked it, and bowed very low. You see he had no idea who I was, seeing me in that fine dress and all. How should he?

"Miss Alice, simple as she was, understood that he was making a mistake, for he stood blushing and bowing before me, not knowing what to say. So she began to laugh, and said,—

"'You need not bow like that; it's only Edith from the farm. She comes up to be played with sometimes.'

"He blushed more than ever then, but his manner quite changed as he said,—

"'And a very pretty plaything, too, for my cousin Alice.'

"I knew that she was but a child for all her thirty years; but I hated her for undeceiving him, and walking off to her bedroom, which was adjacent, I took off my fine clothes and walked home, hurt, angry, and very, very unhappy. To make a long story short, after that first strange meeting I seldom went out of doors without meeting him somewhere, first by chance, on my part at least, and then by arrangement. At the end of the month he was obliged to return to London. I used to write to him every day nearly, and years after I found more than half of those foolish letters unopened. I think that the pang I then felt was punishment enough for having written them. About this time he sent me

a lovely little locket of pearls, which I always wore beneath my dress, that none might know that I possessed such a thing.

"I need hardly tell you that all this could not go on in a small village without arousing a good deal of talk, of which, however, I never dreamed. My step-mother, always on the watch for any shortcomings of mine, heard the gossip, and one night, when Alfred had been about a month gone, and I had been spending the evening with Miss Alice, I came in rather late. I found my father and his wife sitting up for me. She flew at me as I came in, while she seized my arm and almost screamed,—

"'This is a pretty time o' night for a decent young woman to be coming home! Do you think I don't know where you've been? Up at the great house, indeed,—the great house where me and my girls ain't good enough to go. No; you've been walking with a fine young gentleman from London, that you've sold yourself to,—the colonel's nephew. I've watched you; I know you.'

"'Hold your tongue!' shouted my father. 'Come here,' he said to me. 'Does she speak the truth?'

"'Father,' I said, 'don't believe her; don't let her wicked words turn you against your own child; she has always hated me.' And I fell at his feet and began to sob.

"'I'm a liar, am I?' his wife said. 'Ask her to show you what she wears round her neck, and then see if I lie.'

"My father caught me by the arm and tore open my dress. When he saw the locket and chain he raised his

hand to strike me. I cried out and shrank from him in fear, while I tried to explain.

"'Did that man give you the thing you have round your neck?' he asked, savagely.

"'Yes,' I stammered; 'but——'

"'Get out of my house!' he cried, dragging me towards the door; 'there is no room here for dishonest women.' But he called me by a name for which may God forgive him.

"His wife stood by, urging him on. My father was a dreadful man to anger; his men feared him beyond anything. Now, as he stood looking down upon me livid with rage, I forgot how friendless and alone I was; I forgot everything save the overwhelming desire to escape from his angry eyes. I ran out into the night, and when I was so tired that I could go no farther, I sat down upon a fallen tree and thought I know not how long. I sat there sobbing. I must have slept, for when I awoke it was already dawn, and I found that I was near Sandlow, a little village near ours. Then I remembered that the London train stopped there at six o'clock. My mind was made up. I had a few shillings in my pocket; I would go to Alfred. I thought that he would be rejoiced to see me again, and that he would ask nothing better than to make me his wife. You may believe me when I tell you that my father's fearful words were cruel and untrue,—his accusation the first thing which opened my eyes to the possibility of harm.

"I was nearly fainting with fatigue and wild with excitement when I reached Alfred's chambers in London. There was something in the grin which the man

who opened the door gave me which nearly caused me to turn back; but the joy of being so near him, and the certainty I felt of a welcome after all my hard treatment, overcame every other feeling. I crept into the drawing-room, and sat there trembling until the door opened and Alfred entered the room.

"'What the devil!' he began; but I could bear no more, and, weeping wildly, I begged him not to send me away, praying, as it were, for my own undoing. He was loud in his abuse of my father and his wife. When, between my sobs, I told my sad story, or as much of it as I could for very shame, he swore that I should never go back to them, and before the week was out I was living in what seemed to me unheard-of splendor, the only being who was ignorant of the price which I was to pay for it. I think that I did not really love him then; had any one put my position plainly before me I could have parted from him, and would have outlived my girlish fancy for him. It was not long, however, before I worshipped the very ground which he trod. After the birth of my first child he bought a little house in the country, and I saw less of him, though we were but a few miles from town. Still, I never doubted him, and when one morning a friend of his arrived to announce his marriage I was stunned by the blow; I could not believe it, and, hurrying up to London, I heard from his own lips that it was all too true. What I suffered at that fearful time none will ever know. He had not been married many weeks when my boy was born. I used to look at the two children and suffer an agony which no words can describe; then again a wild, intense longing to look into his face

once more would possess me. At last I heard that he and his wife had returned to England. I haunted the park after that, taking my little Edith with me. Twice or thrice I saw them, and I think that Alfred saw me, for his face was very pale as he passed us. They left London again. Before I returned home I met the old colonel and Mrs. Stirling. They came upon me face to face. I held out a supplicating hand, but in vain. The old man made a movement as though he would have stopped, but she hurried him on, casting upon me such a look! I shall never forget it. Mr. Shepherd, the gentleman who had first told me of his marriage, came once to see me. He talked to me of Mrs. Fanshawe; he told me how beautiful and good she was; he told me how sinful it would be for me to ever renew my relations with Alfred, and I then and there promised never to do so. I would have kept my word, but he came to me. It was late one night; the boy was not very well, and I stood anxiously bending over him when Alfred slipped in and stood behind me, looking down for the first time upon his child and mine. He told me that his wife had never loved him, and had now left his house; he said that he now came back, weary of the world and loving only me. Since then he has never left me, and on that fearful night, when death was near us, he seemed to think only of me, and, as he bent over me in that last, wild moment before we threw ourselves into the waves, he kissed me and said that I was indeed his wife, for through all he had loved only me.

"'I was a fool and a coward, Edith,' he said, 'but I have loved you.'"

She ceased, while her head sank upon her hands and her whole frame trembled with convulsive sobs. "How can I live without him?" she cried. "How can I bear my life? I loved him better than aught beside; I love him still."

Beatrice sat silently, thinking it better to let this agony of tears pass unnoticed. Presently she began speaking in a low voice, tenderly, comfortingly, calling upon the wretched woman to remember her children, her duty to them, and her duty towards herself. Gradually Edith raised her head and listened, the great tears still rolling down her cheeks. Beatrice leaned over and kissed her pale face when she had ceased speaking.

"You will not turn from me, will you?" the girl said, holding her kind hand in her own. "You will help me to do better?"

"I will," Beatrice murmured, brushing away the tears which stood in her own eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"IT SHALL BE AS YOU WISH."

"No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever dawned for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear lips was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee."

EMILY BRONTÉ.

ALFRED FANSHAWE'S death made no outward difference to the household at Fern Bank. Theodora made no change in the manner of her life; she had even refused to wear mourning, and went on the even tenor of her way regardless of the praise or blame of those about her.

Two or three months had passed; the June roses were making the garden a paradise, in which Beatrice herself, the fairest flower, was to be found early and late. Reginald Oldham came upon her there in an evil moment.

"I am so glad to see the country so charming," he said in the course of conversation, "for I find that I must give up my intended journey to Norway."

"How disappointing for you! Why cannot you go?"

"The Merchants' Loan Bank of Bombay has failed. After weathering the storm three years ago we all thought it the safest thing possible."

"Indeed!" stammered Beatrice, whose face had changed strangely, though Reginald was unaware of

the fact, his eyes being riveted upon Theodora, who at that moment stepped through the French window on to the lawn. He hastened to meet her, leaving Beatrice full of anxious thought. "How unkind of Theo not to tell me!" she was thinking. "She could not have known, or she would have done so."

Reginald never knew of the mischief which he had caused, for Beatrice did not speak to Theo upon the subject. Two days later, however, when Ethelbert arrived unexpectedly at Fern Bank, he found Beatrice alone, poring over a book, as usual.

"Theodora is from home," she said; "I am so sorry!"

Bertie, strange to say, did not echo this sentiment.

"I hope that I am not interrupting you," he said, presently.

"No," answered Beatrice, laying aside her book as she spoke, and rising from her chair. "No; I have something to say to you."

Full of surprise, Ethelbert merely bowed and awaited her communication. Turning her eyes full upon him, she murmured,—

"Ethelbert, why did you deceive me about that bank? Why have you put me under such an obligation?"

Bertie was overwhelmed with surprise and annoyance.

"Did Theo——?" he began.

Beatrice, seeing the dark cloud upon his brow, hastily interposed.

"Indeed no; I found it out quite by accident, and I cannot take your money, Bertie."

Ethelbert caught the nervous little hands in both his own and held them against his beating heart.

"Beatrice," he cried, "Beatrice, will you always turn from me? Am I so hateful to you that even a paltry few pounds are unacceptable because coming from me, when every penny I have is yours if you will take it? I suppose that it is hopeless to ask for your love, since you have none to give; still, you might trust me, if only as a brother, sufficiently to feel free to accept enough to insure your comfort. You might remember that for years I cherished the hope that I might one day be blessed enough to make your happiness. This you have denied me; but you might make my life more bearable to me and your own more comfortable at the same time by allowing me to be to you what I have tried to be to Theo,—a brother and a defender. Let me watch over you, my darling, and perhaps some day you may feel more kindly towards me."

"More kindly!" she murmured, in a tone of deep reproach. "Have I ever been unkind?"

"You can never know how cruel you have been to me," he cried, passionately, "and you shall never know. Do you think that it has been nothing to me when I have seen you year by year always sad, always hopeless, ever weary of your life, which is more to me a thousand times than my own, still haunted by the memory of your early love? You were fond of me once, dear," he continued, piteously, "before he crossed your path, fond enough of me not to shrink from the thought of becoming my wife. Have you forgotten it all? In what have I changed since those early days? Have I shown myself unworthy of that great happiness

which was so nearly mine, or has my constancy wearied you?"

"Do not turn from me," Beatrice said, "and, above all, do not look back. We should not have been happy, Bertie, even had all been as you wished."

"I should have been more than happy," he cried; "and you, are you happy as it is?"

"Happy!" she exclaimed, raising her eyes to his with such a tone of rebuke in her voice that he flung himself on his knees before her, while his own voice trembled as he said,—

"Forgive me, my darling, forgive me! I am a brute to remind you of all that you have suffered in the past. Only, for God's sake, don't tell me to give up all hope. Remember that I too have suffered."

Beatrice sat so silent that for one moment Ethelbert was forced to believe that his prayer had been unheeded. Suddenly she turned towards him.

"Bertie," she said, gently, "I have been selfish towards you through it all, in those early days at Featherstone and lately, while you have ever been tender and uncomplaining. Now, dear, it shall be as you wish. My best years have passed; I am like my mother,—grown old ere life's journey has well begun. My best love has been given, and I cannot bestow it again, but such affection as I have to give is yours, and yours only."

She had spoken calmly and coherently enough, but Bertie, still kneeling at her feet, gazed up into her face dazed and bewildered.

"I do not understand," he gasped. "Beatrice, is it possible, is it really possible, that at length you actually consent to become my wife?"

Beatrice bowed her head in silence. For yet a moment he was spellbound, and then the strength, which had never for a moment failed him during all those years of hopeless longing and constant disappointment, gave way, and, hiding his face on her knees, he sobbed like a child. Beatrice seemed to understand his emotion, for she spoke no word, only passed her soft hand gently through the golden curls, until he looked up with all an Englishman's *mauvaise honte* when betrayed into any expression of weakness.

"And when will it be?" he asked. "You have kept me waiting a long time, Beatrice."

For a moment she shrank from him, but for a moment only, then she made answer,—

"Whenever you wish."

Ethelbert was too rejoiced to notice the weariness with which she listened to his many plans for the future. It was well that he did not see her face an hour later, when he left her and she sank down before the window with a low moan, crying, "I cannot forget you, my love, my love! I cannot forget you!"

There was something in the manner with which Beatrice received her hearty congratulations which disquieted Theodora not a little. That night, when Bertie had left for London, she sought Beatrice's room.

"Beatrice," she said, taking her hands in her own, "so you love him?"

"Not—not in the way you mean," faltered Beatrice, "but better than any other man. He knows, Theo. I have told him that such love as I have to give is his."

"You are not allowing the failure of that miserable bank to make any difference?"

"Indeed, no," cried Beatrice, earnestly; "money would be the last thing to influence me."

"I did not mean that exactly; but you would surely have no feeling of obligation in accepting a home with me. I knew the truth, and I was wrong in consenting to any deception. You must not marry him, child, if you have the slightest doubts on the subject. It would break his heart to see you unhappy, and cause me a sorrow which I do not like to contemplate."

Thus spoke Theodora, fearlessly. Beatrice kissed her as she murmured,—

"I shall be as happy there as I should anywhere else, and I shall not be parted from you."

Theo said no more, though her mind misgave her.

No doubts assailed Ethelbert. So happy was this dear fellow that he buttonholed every acquaintance he met for days after, and poured his joy and rapture into many unwilling ears.

"Hang the young fool!" growled Captain Savage, whose own married life had not been remarkably blissful; "he nearly knocked me down in Bond Street, after having followed me about half a mile in order to tell me that he was going to make a d——d fool of himself by marrying that Miss Sutherland, who lives with his sister."

"*Stoopid* fool!" said the man addressed; "he might marry any woman in England. As his sister once said, Bertie has the same effect upon a roomful of girls that a grain of rice has upon a bottle of ginger-beer. I could always tell when he entered a room without seeing him, the women brightened up so, mothers and daughters. So he's going to marry a nobody after all?"

Dire and great were the lamentations truly among Belgravian matrons when, thanks to Ethelbert's untiring exertions, his engagement became generally known.

Beatrice herself was pestered with congratulatory letters. Mrs. Featherstone was seized with a sudden longing to see her. Cynthia Trowbridge, after having ignored her existence for two years, wrote in terms of affection which were truly pathetic. Only old Miss Sutherland remained the same, though she added a postscript in her next letter, saying, "I'm glad to hear that you've come to your senses at last. You may tell that young man to come and see me."

Ethelbert objected when Beatrice faithfully delivered the message. When Beatrice next saw her aunt she placed a jewel-case in her hands.

"There they are," the old woman said. "I always said that you should have them when you married, and if you had married a boot-black they should have still been yours."

A little present came about a week before the date fixed for the wedding, worked by Edith's own hands. A letter accompanied it which puzzled Beatrice. "Mrs. Fanshawe has told me not to thank her for her great goodness to me and mine. That she should rob herself for our sake is indeed heaping coals of fire upon my head."

"What have you done, Theo?" asked Beatrice, when she had read the letter.

"Only what was right and just. When I married Captain Fanshawe, he settled three hundred a year upon me in the event of his death. I have made the

money over to Edith and her children; they have not only a greater need of it but a better right. I could not bring myself to touch his money. He did not provide for his own flesh and blood, and I have simply done what he could have done had it been in his nature to fulfil any duty. I have thereby, as far as it is possible, repaired the unwitting wrong which I did that poor woman when I married him. Please say nothing about it, Beatrice, or you will bring down upon my devoted head the indignation of mamma and my lawyers combined."

"And this is the woman whom they call cold and hard!" thought Beatrice.

CHAPTER XXX.

PEACE, PEACE, WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE.

"Early and often enough had I learned that the call to us is, 'Physician, heal thyself;' and how frequently had I been compelled to exclaim in my pain, 'I tread the wine-press alone!'"

GOETHE.

"WITH this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow," said Ethelbert, his clear voice ringing joyously through the whole room.

They were married by special license in the shabby old drawing-room at Fern Bank, only half a dozen friends being present. Reginald Oldham gave away

the bride. An old college friend of Ethelbert's performed the ceremony; another attended him as best man. These, with the exception of Mrs. Featherstone and her husband, were the only guests present, Miss Sutherland being too ill to appear, and Mrs. Baskervyle too intensely chagrined by her son's marriage to accept Theo's invitation.

Beatrice looked very pale in her white raiment. She had begged to be allowed to dispense with the usual bridal array, but Ethelbert had pleaded his desire to remember her in her wedding-dress.

"It will be so nice to remember you as you were then when you are quite an old woman," he said, with a laugh.

Beatrice looked up, a look of horror on her pale face.

"Oh! I shall never be old," she said. She agreed, however, to humor his fancy, and came down to meet him, looking, in her snowy garments, like some fair, white lily. No one heard the sound of her voice save when she repeated the clergyman's words mechanically. There were no tears shed; it was with perfect calmness and self-possession that Beatrice kissed Theodora and her sister when, followed by her husband, she stepped into the carriage which was to take them to the station.

Colonel and Mrs. Featherstone speedily made their adieux.

"She might have been marrying a briefless barrister!" indignantly exclaimed that little lady, ere their brougham-door had well closed upon them. "I hate those people who never can do anything like anybody else. How pretty the wedding might have been at Featherstone!"

"It would have been very expensive," responded her spouse.

"Well, she will have a splendid position, and, mark my words, Ralph, she'll make nothing of it."

"I dare say not, my dear; but I'm very glad that she's married,—the manner does not matter much, so long as 'tis legal."

"I think that she might have asked you to give her away. I'm afraid poor Beatrice has very little natural affection. I only hope that she will do something for the children," said Mrs. Featherstone, with a sigh.

"You might ask them down to Featherstone; it will cost money, of course, but, unless he brings his horses, it won't be so much."

"I have asked them, but from Scotland they go direct to King's Gift. You will see that Beatrice will be glad enough to get away from Lord Huxington's place; she thinks the English climate odious. I don't know what she will think of Scotland."

"Perhaps they'll change their mind and come to us for a time. Will you stop in town and see your aunt?"

"Indeed I shall not, after her disgraceful treatment of me, giving every jewel she possesses to Beatrice, just as though she needed them. Ethelbert has bought her more than she knows what to do with. As to the Atherling diamonds, they are something fabulous."

"Perhaps the girls will get your aunt's jewels in the end; Beatrice cares so little for those kind of things."

"It will be an excellent thing for the girls if she takes to them," said Mrs. Featherstone, as she fell to ruminating upon the possibility of a future sphere of

greatness which her sister's high position might open up to her.

Mrs. Featherstone was right in supposing that Beatrice would be glad to return to England, much as she dreaded the return to King's Gift,—a place so full of memories at once sweet and sad and inexpressibly sacred; still, the step must be taken, and the sooner the better. Ethelbert, too, was anxious to return home: he wanted to show his beautiful bride to an admiring tenantry; he wished to see her sitting at the head of his table. How beautiful the noble old house would be, filled with the presence of Beatrice's gracious womanhood!

They arrived one beautiful summer evening. The horses were, to Beatrice's great relief, allowed to do their duty unassisted by struggling tenants, though these worthies lined the roads and manifested the utmost enthusiasm. Poor Beatrice! She shrank from the cheers of the multitude as she would have from the howls of an infuriated mob. She threw herself into an arm-chair with a groan when, having passed through a long line of smiling servants, she reached her own room. Bertie joined her presently.

"It's all very jolly, isn't it, Beatrice?"

"Very," answered his wife; "but I don't know exactly how to take it, you see," with a shy smile. "I have never been of much importance before."

Bertie silenced her with a kiss, and together they descended the staircase.

"I've had nothing changed, you see," Ethelbert said, flinging open the door of the small drawing-room, as it was called.

Beatrice entered. How natural it all looked! She could almost hear Cynthia's voice singing low, with tears between,—

> "Time does thrust me from thine arms,
> Good-by, sweetheart, good-by."

Her eyes filled while she passed on into an adjacent room to hide her emotion. The following day Beatrice was conducted through numberless rooms which she had never seen before. Ethelbert was delighted to find her thus employed.

"You take an interest in it all, little woman," he whispered, tenderly.

The housekeeper stopped suddenly in the dining-hall. "That is a portrait of the late earl," she said, pointing upward, "presented to his lordship by the tenantry. I beg pardon, your ladyship knew him."

"Yes, I knew him," the poor child said as she hurried on.

This was the last day of peace, for the county families descended upon them in shoals,—neighboring noblemen and their families, country gentlemen, clergymen, retired army officers, and merchant princes.

Beatrice received her guests with kind, welcoming smiles. Nature had gifted her with a graciousness which I cannot but attribute to her foreign birth, for it is certainly as rare in England as flowers in December. There was nothing false in it. I think that it was a flower born of her own pure heart, in which reigned that charity which "thinketh no evil." The great ladies, who were impressed in spite of themselves by her grace, sweetness, and beauty, were not only aston-

ished, but disgusted, when they found that the rich manufacturer's wife and daughters, and the poor clergyman's widow, were greeted with precisely the same cordiality which had marked their own welcome. Lady Atherling fell immediately in their estimation. To be true, to be loving and kind, is not the way to insure the admiration and respect of the great world. She used to look so lovely sitting at the head of her table, or moving about the noble old rooms, that Ethelbert failed to notice her ever-increasing pallor, the weariness of her step, and the sad tones of her clear young voice. The endless dinner-parties which were given and returned tried both her strength and patience. She sat among the crowd as lonely as a shipwrecked sailor tossed in mid-ocean, the only survivor of hundreds. This utter loneliness was appalling. Their ways were not her ways, nor their thoughts her thoughts. She had never known before how Theo's noble life and original conversation had unfitted her for the puerilities of general society. "I have outgrown it," she said to herself, with a smile.

"Ethelbert," exclaimed his wife, "I never appreciated the Sabbath before. Pray proclaim it to the county that I keep the day with the rigidity of a Scotch Presbyterian. I shall lock the door and refuse to look upon man, woman, or child for this one day of the week, always excepting yourself."

"But, my darling," expostulated Bertie, "we must go to church."

"Not to-day, please, Ethelbert. I've had such a busy week."

"You see, dear," explained her husband, "'tis our

first Sunday here, and it will not do for us to stay at home; the rector is sure to have composed an eloquent sermon expressly. We'll have to go, dear,—I'm very sorry."

Beatrice covered her face with her hands with a sigh, which was almost a groan, when she found herself alone. How should she bear this life which she had entered into so unthinkingly? To be answerable to the rector of the parish and the entire county for all her actions, she, who for years had been so perfectly free and unfettered! "I will make him a good wife," she murmured. "I will make him a good wife."

The clergyman was already in the reading-desk when they entered. He waited, as in duty bound, until the lord of the soil was seated. How thankful Beatrice was that the high-curtained pew shut her out from all curious eyes!

The congregation rose to their feet. Beatrice rose likewise, but she saw no word of the burial-service, at which she had unwittingly opened her prayer-book. A fair white tablet stood out from the wall above their pew, upon which her eyes were fixed as though they could never part therefrom; there she read, "Sacred to the memory of Edgar Hugh Baskervyle, sixth Earl of Atherling, who departed this life March the 10th, in the thirty-seventh year of his age." Mechanically she read the words over and over again, until the dear well-known name seemed to convey no meaning to her mind. Again she saw the dawn of that dreary March morning; again the white face of the dead was before her in all its fearful majesty. There, on the tablet above her, her agony was written. There, in great

black letters, was the name which had been dearest to her, followed by a string of empty titles which had availed him little on earth, and could avail him nothing now. And she, who had so loved him, how could she still live on, the wife of another man?

The cold stone seemed to frown down upon her; the clergyman's voice sounded strange and far away. He, too, was repeating, in a monotonous undertone, "The wife of another man, the wife of another man." Then a great darkness surrounded her; the floor seemed to sway under her feet. Suddenly the clergyman stopped short in the psalm which he was reading, and every eye was turned towards the King's Gift pew, from which Lady Atherling was borne, to all appearance lifeless.

"You must take her away from this," said the London doctor whom Ethelbert had summoned in all haste. "Her ladyship is far from strong; her duties at home are naturally onerous. Perfect quiet and freedom from care is what I should recommend, and a warmer climate than ours for the winter: the south of France or Italy. Nothing to alarm your lordship,—a little delicacy of the lungs."

Again silence fell upon the noble old house, while far away in Italy its mistress was gaining health and strength, while Ethelbert, whose alarm would have been amusing had it not been pitiful, was watching, as only those who love can watch, the tender color coming again into his wife's pale cheeks, her strained, weary eyes resuming their old look of tender thoughtfulness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LET NOT HIM WHO PUTTETH HIS HAND TO THE PLOUGH TURN BACKWARD.

"Oh, well for him who breaks his dream
With the blow that ends the strife,
And waking knows the peace that flows
Around the pain of life!"

REGINALD OLDHAM was much to be pitied. Since the death of Theodora's husband he had been hovering about her, striving vainly to read something more than friendly interest in her clear eyes, something more than kindly welcome in her firm hand-pressure. He was obliged to acknowledge that if Theodora entertained any warmer feeling than that of friendship for him, she certainly succeeded wonderfully in hiding it. No word or look of his had ever brought the color to her pure face; no word of hers had ever given him reason to hope that his affection was even acknowledged, and therefore tolerated. Perhaps Theo had been rather selfish in that she had allowed herself to accept the shelter and protection which she found in his firm friendship, without reference to the possible effect upon himself. Her only excuse was that, since she had failed so utterly in her honest endeavors to retain her husband's love, it had never occurred to her that any man could regard her in the light of anything nearer and dearer than a true or even tender friend.

Winter was turning reluctantly into spring far away in Italy. Beatrice was envying every bird flying westward.

"A feeling of unrest oppresses me," she wrote to Theodora. "I dare not say the word England, for my doctor looks grave immediately; but I had promised myself the pleasure of passing February at Fern Bank. It is a spring-time lost out of one's life not to be in England then. We return to King's Gift in June, and there remain until my baby is born. Ethelbert is so anxious that it should be a boy; but a girl would be a great deal more to me. One can be everything to a daughter all her life, but with a son it is different; he goes from one, and is monopolized by the world. The saddest part of my mother's life must have been her separation from me, and the fact that I could not love her as I would have done had my childhood been passed by her side. Do you remember what Richter says about this, that 'child-like love can only spring up towards a heart whereon we have long reposed, and which has protected us, as it were, with the first heart's-leaves against cold nights and hot days'?"

Theodora was in the midst of this letter when Oldham was announced.

"Ethelbert and Beatrice will be back in June," she said, when she had greeted him. Her face was flushed, and in her blue eyes there was a great joy.

"How fond you are of them!" he said, half jealously.

"Yes," she made answer, "I am too fond of them."

Oldham looked at her with some surprise. Seeing that she did not speak, he said,—

"It is really spring-like. Will you not come out?"

Theodora complied; and they walked for a mile or more over the hard, smooth sand, for the most part in utter silence.

"How far we have come!" said Theo, presently. "Had we not better turn?"

"Not just this minute," objected Oldham. "I have something to say to you. Will you sit down upon this rock if you are tired?"

Theo complied, not very much surprised, for he often came to her for advice; and, folding her hands, prepared to listen.

Reginald stood before her in silence for a moment.

"Theodora," he said, "love-speeches are not much in my way, as perhaps you know. You ought to know it, for I have loved you now for five years, and breathed no word of it. I have asked you to come out with me to-day in order to make my confession. I loved you in the early days in Baden. I began by pitying you, a fact which your pride would have keenly resented; but I was careful that none should know that I was aware how you were being deceived by those whom you trusted too well. I, the man of all others usually most indifferent to the actions of those about me, became suddenly wonderfully quick to see all that went on. I was a fool not to recognize that it was love which had sharpened my eyes. I tried to warn you once, and you looked up at me, and said, 'I think I do not understand treachery.' Do you remember, Theo?"

For all answer she merely bowed her head.

"When, nearly a year afterwards," he went on, "you turned to me in your trouble, accepting my friendship,

and returning it, I was mad enough to hope that you might love me; and when death restored to you your liberty I was glad,—yes, I was glad. Life seemed a new thing to me, and its capabilities for happiness unbounded; but still I suffered at that time. I was jealous of your husband, Theo. I had never thought of him as a rival before. He seemed to me to have so lost all claim on your affection. I only realized his power when he lay dead before you, and you sank on your knees by his side. I was jealous. Sometimes I am so still. I am forced to believe that your love for him was the one love of your life, and that all my devotion is impotent to awaken any emotion save the quiet, friendly interest which you have accorded me. Is it so, Theodora?" He was very pale as he stood before her, pleading his cause with the only eloquence at his command,—the eloquence of truth.

"Yes, it is so," Theodora murmured, after a moment's hesitation. "In a measure it is so; and yet 'a quiet, friendly interest' does not in the least describe what I feel for you. I am very fond of you,—almost as fond as I am of Beatrice and of Bertie,—but I do not love you; and I can never marry you, or, indeed, any man. You were speaking but just now of Baden. During all my trouble there I was almost distracted with grief, and so overwhelming was my disappointment that life seemed utterly hopeless. During those weary weeks in Paris, while I lay lonely and ill on my bed, I thought a great deal; and I then said to myself, 'No one shall ever again have the power to so greatly influence my life. I will lead the life which I have marked out for myself. I will live alone, if necessary

to do so.' I said to myself then that I had made a great, a fatal mistake, in that I had allowed myself to be persuaded into marrying any man. I was utterly unfitted for married life then; I am doubly unfitted for it now. For years I have been my own mistress; I have owned no authority, I have formed no near ties. I became very fond of Beatrice, truly, but you see I have in a great measure lost her, and I survive the loss. Were you to die, or cease to be my friend, a part of my life, and a very pleasant part, would have gone; but my course in life, the road which I have marked out for myself, would still remain, and I should go on the even tenor of my way, my work still clear before me."

"But, Theodora, I would be the last man to urge you to neglect your work for my sake. Am I so selfish, so exacting, that in becoming my wife you would deem it necessary to neglect all others? Theodora, do not let the memory of the bitter past influence you. Nothing in life is less satisfactory than retrospect. You have had a hard experience, a great deal of sadness; forget it all, Theodora, and let me make your future life happy."

"But I am not unhappy. I know few people who are as contented as I am myself. I dreamed a troubled dream, from which I soon awoke, and now I stand alone, truly, but firm. You would not be happy, Reginald, were I to yield to your wishes. You are strong, very opiniative, and you would wish your wife to bow to your judgment; *that* I could never do. I have lived too much alone, I have drunk too deeply of freedom, to bow tamely to the will of others. Lastly, though not least, I have undertaken a work in life in

which I have succeeded beyond my wildest hopes. I am not one to turn back; while I live I will work as I am now working to improve the condition of woman, and fit her for the position which, sooner or later, in spite of all opposition, she is bound to take. Do not urge me, Reginald; I know that I am right. And oh, why could you not have left things as they were, or rather as I thought they were?"

"I might have known it," Reginald said; "I might have known that your life was full enough without me. And yet, Theo, could you have loved me first, before that man's paltry love was offered you, we might have been very happy, and I do not think that you would have been less useful than you are now. I shall go away, dear, for a month or two. If I leave you, it is not with the idea that I shall ever forget you, or that any woman will ever take your place in my heart; but by the time I return all that has passed between us here this morning will be as though it had not been; and Theo, my Theo," here his voice broke pitifully, "naught save death shall part us. It is not that I love you, only, but that you seem to me nobler, better, truer than any other human being. Let me be your friend, Theo, for whether you will it or otherwise, my life is bound up in yours."

"You shall be my friend, Reginald," Theo answered, "but do not bind your life; live it, as I hope to live mine, untrammelled. All the wisdom in the world will not teach us more than this,—to be sufficient unto ourselves."

It was two months after this before Theodora again saw Oldham. He greeted her, then, kindly, if a little

sadly, and ere the June roses had faded they met at King's Gift, where Beatrice reigned once more. Surely sceptre was never swayed by gentler hands. Years after, Theodora looked back and wondered at their blindness, wondered that she whom they all loved could have passed into the silent land with so slow yet sure a step that those about her knew not whither she was wending. Once only was Theodora alarmed. She had followed Beatrice down to the church, where she might often be found seated at the organ, which was a magnificent instrument, and had been Ethelbert's gift. She was playing when Theodora entered, and did not hear her. Theo, hidden by the curtains which surrounded the organ-loft, stood watching her sister's face. The old church rang with the sound of Chopin's funeral march, while the face of the player was full of a light which was not of this earth. Theodora stood rooted to the spot, filled with a dread so great that her very heart seemed to cease to beat, until the plaintive sounds died away, and, closing the organ, Beatrice approached where she was standing.

"Why do you play such melancholy music, child?" asked Theodora, as together they left the church.

"Do you call it melancholy?" said Beatrice, in a tone of surprise. "To me it breathes of the most perfect rest and peace,—a rest undisturbed by aught, and that 'peace which passeth all understanding.'" Her voice sank as she spoke, and Theodora, the solemnity of the music still upon her, walked by her side in perfect silence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION.

"Ashamed, I go apart from men, and solitary, weeping, I lament, and call on Beatrice, 'Art thou dead?' "

A DAY came when there was great rejoicing at King's Gift, and bitter weeping ere night fell. The quiet stars came out one by one. The very air was motionless, while all nature seemed to partake of the hush of death which filled the old house.

On her bed, her face beautiful in death as in life, lay Beatrice. A smile parted her lips; her brown hair fell long and soft about her sweet face; the little white hands were folded softly. She made such a beautiful, peaceful picture that the passionate grief of the man who knelt by her bedside seemed strangely out of place.

Theodora sat in the adjoining room, clasping in her arms Beatrice's little daughter. The tiny creature lay sleeping peacefully.

"Baby, baby," murmured Theo, "you little know what you have cost us!"

All that day she had bent over her sister, speaking words of comfort and encouragement; and now that those ears must ever be deaf to mortal words, placing the child in its nurse's arms, she stole to the chamber of death and took her place by her brother's side.

"Bertie," she whispered, "my dear brother, I do not ask you not to grieve, that would be unnatural; but why should your grief be so bitter? You strove so honestly to make her life happy; you were so true, so kind; you have nothing wherewith to reproach yourself. This thought must comfort you; she died blessing you."

"I cannot live without her," the poor husband said, "I cannot live without her. Theo, I was a boy when I loved her first, and you know how true I have been to her, how long I waited and hoped against hope; and now, now, when we might have been so happy, she is taken from me! It is hard, Theo; it is hard!"

Together they sat during the long hours of the night. Towards morning, worn out with grief and watching, Ethelbert slept, while Theodora, with one long look at the mother's peaceful face, slipped away to where the babe lay; tenderly she took the little creature into her strong arms, soothing it to sleep again when, with a little piteous cry, it awoke.

"Lor'! but she's a natural born mother," said the old nurse. "The way she holds that child is beautiful, so it is!"

Care and anxiety for the baby made the days which succeeded less terrible for Theodora than they were for Ethelbert, whose grief made him callous even towards his own child. He wandered from room to room hopelessly, purposeless. Never had he felt so lonely, never had life seemed dreary and unprofitable before. Once or twice he strayed into the nursery to inquire for the baby, but he left again without so much as looking at his little daughter. On the third night, however, the

child was pronounced in danger, and the father came and bent over the bed whereon it lay.

"What name, my lord?" asked the old clergyman, who had been called in in hot haste to christen the little one.

"Beatrice!" he murmured, and then fell sobbing by the bedside.

Little Beatrice was spared, and slept peacefully through the long hours of the following day, unconscious that the King's Gift vault had been opened again, and closed upon the mother who had not lived to look upon her face.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit: for they rest from their labors."

The last time that Ethelbert had heard those words, Hugh had been laid in his grave. And now the woman whom he had loved was placed beside him! In death they were not divided.

The massive doors were closed. All was over!

Do you know what it means, you who read, thus to resign what is dearer than life itself? Do you know what it is to turn from an open grave into which the sod is falling with heavy thud, and leave behind you—cold in the earth—the being whom you have cherished so tenderly for years? Surely, there are griefs which it is a wonder that we can survive. Yet we live on with the everlasting cry "Thou shalt renounce!" ringing ever in our ears.

That night Ethelbert placed a sealed letter in his sister's hands.

"I found it in her desk," he said. "It is addressed to you, and she has asked me to give you this." He

held out the diamond cross which Hugh had given Beatrice years before.

Theo took it in silence, and that night, in the solitude of her own room, she read her letter.

"My Theo! my sister!" it said. "Something—I know not what—tells me that the end is near; that the trial through which I have to pass will be my last; and when this letter reaches your dear hands, life—that 'long disquiet' merged in rest—will be over for me! It was on my lips to tell you my secret as we walked home from the church to-day. You did not know that it was my own requiem which I was playing, when you scolded me for my melancholy choice of music.

"I am thankful to know that when the supreme moment has arrived I shall be able to press your strong hand. Without its kind aid my life would have been doubly dreary. You will comfort Bertie. My poor boy, how bitterly he will feel my loss! How tender, how true, how loyal he has been! Should my child live, you will look upon it as a precious legacy, and be to it what you have been to me,—a friend, the best, the dearest, the truest.

"I cannot bid you farewell, Theo! Surely, in that future which seems so much less dim to me now that I stand upon the threshold of the Great Unknown than when years ago we speculated about it,—in that future we shall be reunited, and all crooked things will be made straight. A blessed sense of rest and peace is upon me, which almost makes 'quick-coming death a little thing,' and banishes all doubt, all fear!"

Here the letter suddenly ceased. With quick-falling

tears Theodora pressed her lips to the paper, while she murmured,—

"I will be true to the trust! I will be true, my darling!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A PERFECT WOMAN NOBLY PLANNED.

"To love and bear; to hope till hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,
Neither to change, nor flatter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone life, joy, empire, and victory."

SHELLEY."

FULL well Theodora fulfilled the trust confided to her. The baby grew into a lovely little maiden, so like her mother that Ethelbert would sit looking at her until Theo's heart was almost broken. All persuasion was vain to induce Theodora to take up her abode at King's Gift. The nurse and child were transported to Fern Bank. Theo made a very pretty picture when, little Beatrice in her arms, she would walk across the green lawn to meet the child's father. Every year improved her beauty, and after she passed her twenty-eighth year she adopted a sober, matronly style of dress, which made her look like some young queen. Yet somehow no one spoke of Mrs. Fanshawe as a beauty, though no one ever passed her without

looking twice at the handsome, open face. In one man's eyes, at least, she remained the one perfect woman. Reginald Oldham could never believe that Theodora's judgment had been better than his own when she refused to become his wife. But I am inclined to think that Theodora was right,—her life is full, her usefulness unbounded.

Every month brings her a letter from the far West, where, in one of the large cities of mushroom growth which in the last twenty years have sprung up in the Western States and Territories of the great republic, Edith lives a quiet, not unhappy life, among kindly people, the sins and sorrows of her early life buried in oblivion. When she left the shores of England she left all the past behind her. The burden which she bears, and must bear, is that "one fatal remembrance" which has cast a dark shadow over many lives otherwise calm and contented. Her children are healthy, with ruddy cheeks and strong arms, which they owe to their yeoman ancestry. None of them bear the slightest resemblance to their father, a fact which I am afraid the mother is foolish enough to regret. Little Alfred is like him in face, truly, but his character is that of his stern old grandfather, softened and refined by his mother's gentle influence. Acting upon Theodora's advice, Edith has breathed to them no word of the patrician blood which flows in their veins, teaching them that their lives must be lives of honest toil. More than once their mother has been asked to share the hardly-earned wealth of some rough Western settler. She has always refused, gently though firmly. Her life is bound up in her children; their sorrows her sorrows,

their joys her joys; they reward her, as children are wont to do, with endless demands upon her patient love.

When I last saw Theodora she was sitting before me at an afternoon concert. Unseen, I sat for some time watching her. Suddenly I saw the grave face assume an expression of disquiet, which was very unusual; following the direction of her eyes, I ascertained the cause thereof. Two women had entered the room, not together,—the dowager Lady Atherling would have died sooner than be seen in the company of Mrs. Trowbridge, and passed her now with a stony stare. Cynthia took her seat and shook out her dress. She was greatly changed from the Cynthia of old. The blue eyes were still bright, but they had lost their dewy softness; the tender rose-tint of her round cheeks was replaced by "rouge de théâtre." The pretty baby mouth was surrounded by hard lines. She had grown stout, too, and there was nothing attractive about her save a certain sensuous softness. Her husband was not with her; men said that poor Jack Trowbridge was dreadfully changed from the honest, carelessly happy young fellow of years ago. Theodora met him once; she was pained to see the alteration in his kind, ugly face.

"It is a long time since we met," she had said, holding out her hand.

"Yes, it is a long time," he answered, mournfully. "Things have very much changed for me since then, Mrs. Fanshawe,—very much changed, but I have never forgotten you," he continued, lowering his voice; "and when I am tempted to doubt all women—and God knows

I've reason to doubt them—I remember what you were. It was not my fault if our acquaintance only brought trouble upon you."

"Do not let us talk of all that," Theo had said; "and when you have time come down to Fern Bank and see all my children. Life is never quite satisfactory, and we have all to content ourselves with but a modicum of sunshine."

Something of the life which Mrs. Trowbridge led was known to Theodora. Suffice it to say that what she knew made her thankful that the old clergyman, her father, lay these many years beneath the sod. Therefore, when Jack spoke thus she dared not attempt to comfort him. I think that he knew how kind were her thoughts nevertheless.

Ida had changed less than Cynthia. Cold, shrewd, passionless in years gone by, she was now the same. She was so thin as to be almost angular, but such good looks as she once possessed were hers still. Report says that the days of her widowhood are drawing to a close, and that she will shortly espouse a certain lord bishop, who, being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, who had not where to lay his head, draws from the church of which he is so bright an ornament an income of some fifteen thousand pounds,—a fact which Lady Atherling may have taken into consideration when she agreed to be episcopally espoused. Mrs. Baskervyle remains her warm admirer and friend.

"She is doing so well, my dear," she said, when she announced the proposed marriage to her daughter. "I always said that Ida would succeed in life."

"That is a fact not to be doubted," answered Theo.

"And yet you would never share my admiration for the dear girl, or allow yourself to be influenced by her example."

"But I can't acknowledge that success is the only thing desirable," objected Theo.

"Well, my dear," said her mother, uttering the sentiments of the world which she loved, "I don't know what should succeed if not success."

I caught sight of Ethelbert as I left the concert-room. He was bending over a fresh-faced young English girl, who had worshipped him from afar off for years past. I was somewhat astonished at such a gathering of the clan until I learned that the young débutante, who had charmed us all with her lovely voice, was a pupil of Theodora's. I hastened to congratulate her. She was entering her carriage as I came up to her. Little Beatrice was stretching out eager arms from the window. She invited me to enter, which I did. We had a long and pleasant conversation. Nothing could have been more healthy than the tone of her mind, nothing more cheerful than her views of life. But once a shadow crossed her face; it was when she told me of Ethelbert's probable engagement.

"I like the little creature," she said; "but I cannot understand it, after loving the woman he did love—but men are so different from us in all that."

"She is a pretty little woman," I made answer. "The fact of her social position being equal to his own makes it satisfactory, I suppose."

"No, I do not think that has made any difference. They are both willing that I should keep Beatrice with me, which is a cause of thankfulness."

I watched her drive off, her little niece seated by her side, her kind face full of love and peace, and thanked God that the clouds which had darkened her early life had now passed forever away.

My dear, strong, noble Theo! These are the last words which I may ever write of her. I lay down my pen with regret, for truly

> "Her mission, accomplish'd, is o'er,
> The mission of genius on earth. To uplift,
> Purify, and confirm, by its own gracious gift,
> The world, in despite of the world's dull endeavor
> To degrade and drag down and oppose it forever.
> The mission of genius, to watch and to wait,
> To renew, to redeem, and to regenerate."

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THE END.

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